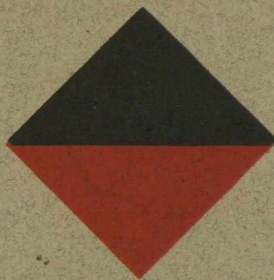


# THE STORY OF THE TWENTY-FIRST

*Being the Official History of the  
21st Battalion, A.I.F.*



A. R. MACNEIL.

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*With 9 Specially-Prepared Maps.*

PUBLISHED BY

THE 21ST BATTALION ASSOCIATION

MELBOURNE, 1920.

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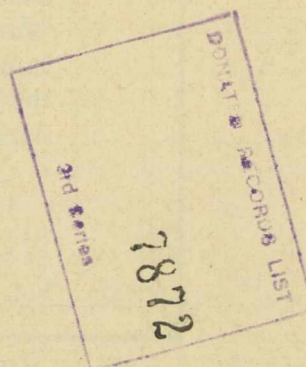


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EDITOR :  
CAPTAIN A. R. MACNEIL, M.C.

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1920.



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## *To the Reader.*

*In placing this little book before the members of the 21st Battalion in particular, and the people of Australia in general, the Editor wishes to acknowledge with thanks the assistance which he has received in its production. Most of the names of places, dates, and dispositions in the line, were obtained from the diary kept by Lieut. Col. B. O. C. Duggan, D.S.O. The reader is indebted to Capt. F. Sale, M.C., for the map of the Western Front, showing each movement of the Battalion. This map we believe to be the first of its kind attempted. The other maps have been drafted by Mr. A. E. Scammell, of the Australian War Records Section. The Editor claims no literary merit for his work, but has aimed at producing an accurate and readable account of the doings of our unit, so that the days that were may be recalled more clearly through the haze of the days that have been since.*

*The 21st Battalion Association, having financed the publication of this Book, would thank any reader for passing on the information to his friends, that it can be obtained for Two Shillings, post free, from the Hon. Secretary, 391 Little Collins Street, Melbourne, Victoria.*

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# FOREWORD

Regimental Records appeal to readers of three kinds: to the veteran, who delights in refreshing his memories of past events; to the patriot, whose pride of race is justified by the faithful narrative of undying glory; to the student of mankind and warfare, who realises that his studies are valueless without intimate knowledge of character, method and nature of men. Such Records are, therefore, documents of the first importance, and there are few that do not deserve an honoured place in our homes.

To those who witnessed the early days of the 21st Battalion, and the sure development of their regimental spirit, the record of the Black and Red Diamond is just another example of effect following cause. There were the men to lead, and men who were eager to follow in body, mind, and spirit: failure was unthinkable, and success was certain. Yet to describe these men adequately, to do justice to their merits and methods, is the most difficult task in the world.

The 21st, with "B" Company of the 23rd, have a special claim to the regard of all who served in the 2nd Division, since they proved by their conduct on the torpedoed "Southland," that their discipline and soldierly spirit was equal to the severest test. They gained the higher honour of claiming that the standard of their recruit days was well maintained to the end. Even in those dark days of 1918, when the sheer necessity of numbers forced the disbandment of so many glorious Battalions of the A.I.F., the 21st adhered to their self-imposed standards in a manner that brought tears of sympathy and bitter regret to every soldier's heart.

There was throughout the 21st a spirit of willing co-operation that merits special record. Eager to help to the utmost of their ability, to disregard all motives except those that forward the common cause, to do their job properly and completely for their own satisfaction: these were the regimental qualities which warrant the proud claim to-day: "I, too, was found worthy to serve alongside the 21st."

JOHN GELLIBRAND.

Maj.-Gen.

Risden,  
Tasmania.

# The Story of the Twenty-First.

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## I.

### Formation and Training.

After the departure of the First Australian Division and the Fourth A I Brigade from Australia in 1914, the depots in the different States rapidly assumed unwieldy proportions. More men were offering their services than were needed to reinforce the troops already in the field, and in March, 1915, it was decided to form three new Infantry Brigades, the 5th, 6th, and 7th, and a Light Horse Brigade, the 4th. The 3rd L H Brigade had embarked in February, 1915.

The 21st, 22nd and 23rd Battalions of the 6th Infantry Brigade were at once formed in Victoria. The 24th Battalion was originally composed of South Australians, and was not formed as a Victorian unit until a week before we sailed.

The 21st Battalion was made up of "L" to "S" Companies from the Infantry Depot at Broadmeadows, together with 250 men from the Light Horse Depot. During the last week of March the brigade was officially handed over to the Brigadier, Col R. Linton, and went to live in its new Camp at the Eastern end of the old depot. The command of the 21st Battalion was entrusted to Lt-Col J F Hutchinson, with Major E A Harris as Second in Command, and Capt F W D Forbes as Adjutant. The Company commanders were "A," Maj C H Raitt, "B," Maj W J Bateman, "C," Lt N F Wellington, "D," Lt B O C Duggan. Of these officers Capt Forbes and Lt Duggan later commanded the 21st Batta, while Maj Harris was transferred to command the 59th Batta, and Maj Bateman to command the 19th Batta.

During April the Battalion was organised and trained as a unit, transport, machine gun, and signalling sections were formed, and the troops shook down into the happy family life which lasted throughout our career. From those early days the 21st was the only unit as far as we were concerned, and the spirit of the original members spread itself through all those who joined us later on. The first week of May was spent in frenzied attempts to equip the Battalion, and to weed out the unfit. Both attempts were successful, and on the 8th May, 1915, we left Broadmeadows at midday, to embark on R M A T "Ulysses" lying at the Town Pier, Port Melbourne.

Embarkation was quietly carried out. There was no fanfare of trumpets, and that night we slipped from the pier down the bay in company with the "Euripides," which carried the 23rd and 24th Battalions. On our boat, besides ourselves, there were Brigade H Q and the 22nd Battalion. Troopship life was strenuous. Like the rest of the A I F, we lived on troop decks, slept in hammocks, grumbled at the food, and in between times wrote home. Parades were held at 7 a m for "jerks," 10 till 12, and 2 till 4 for General Instruction. The ground work obtained during these parades in musketry and the theoretical part of soldiering enabled us to start work in Egypt in a fairly advanced stage of training.

The sea was smooth throughout the trip. The main incidents were our visit to Colombo, the subsequent trouble over the punishment of absentees, and finally the glorious trip through the Suez Canal in

## *"THE STORY OF THE TWENTY-FIRST."*

daylight Here we saw troops on active service for the first time, as the "line" was then right on the Canal bank

On arrival at Alexandria, at 2 p. m. on 8th June, most of the troops took French leave for the evening Next day we entrained for Helmhieh Siding, thence we marched to the Aerodrome Camp, Heliopolis, which was our home for the next three months

Our first stay in Egypt is one of our happiest memories In spite of the heat, and the not too good tucker, we enjoyed our time off thoroughly Hard training in the early mornings and evenings kept us very fit Heliopolis was just next door to our camp, and Cairo 20 minutes by electric train, and the sights, sounds and smells of our new surroundings interested us We worked through the individual and collective stages of training rapidly, and spent most of July doing Battalion and Brigade exercises on the desert Junior officers and senior NCO's. underwent a course at the Zeitoun School, which had beneficial effects upon our efficiency

In July, the 5th, 6th, and 7th Brigades were formed into the 2nd Australian Divi-

sion under Maj-Gen Legge, who was brought from Gallipoli to take charge Engineer companies and signallers were drawn from the Infantry, and trained with us The 13th Light Horse was detached as Divisional Cavalry, but we had no artillery, and did not get any until after our return from the Peninsula

From 12th to 23rd August "C" Company garrisoned the Cairo Citadel, the other three companies, Kasr-el-Nil and Bab-el-Hadid Barracks in the city itself. We were the first Australian troops to act as garrison in Cairo

On returning to Heliopolis we absorbed our 1st and 2nd reinforcements, which brought us to full strength, and on the night of the 29th August entrained at Helmhieh Siding once more, as a fully trained Australian unit, ready to take our place at the side of the 1st Division, which had already made its name immortal on Gallipoli

The 5th Inf Bde had preceded us by a week, and, even while we were entraining, was taking part in the last effort which was made to cross the Gallipoli Peninsula, and open the Dardanelles to our fleet



## *"THE STORY OF THE TWENTY-FIRST."*

### II.

## GALLIPOLI.

Embarkation took place at Alexandria on 30th August, the ship pulling out of the harbour the same day. On board the "Southland" with us were 2nd Divisional Headquarters, 6th Inf Bde H Q, "B" Coy 23rd Battn, and various details.

The voyage was uneventful until the ship had nearly reached her destination, Mudros Bay, when we had our first test of discipline in the face of enemy action. At this time the regulations for the wearing of lifebelts, submarine guards, and the like had not been instituted, so we were very much taken by surprise when the transport was torpedoed off the Island of Stratae, at 9.50 a.m. on the 2nd September, 1915. The troops on board were just assembling for 10 o'clock parade, and many, including the writer, saw the torpedo coming. It struck just forward of the bridge, and the ship listed rapidly. There was some confusion among the crew, but the troops quietly put on their life belts, and stood by at their boat stations.

By 11 a.m. all the boats, mostly collapsibles, were launched, and the few troops left on board were taken off by the hospital ship "Neuralia," which together with several other vessels arrived on the scene a little before noon. A volunteer party of eighteen remained on board, and under the directions of the ship's officers got up steam, before a salvage crew was put on board from a destroyer. The "Southland" then, under her own power, was beached in Mudros Harbour about 7 p.m. All the small boats were picked up by 3.30 p.m., and the Battalion was reorganised, and refitted on board the "Transylvania" at Mudros.

Our casualties were light, amounting to only 30 or 40 all told. Among these, however, was our Brigadier, Col. Linton, who died from the results of exposure in the water, after his boat had overturned.

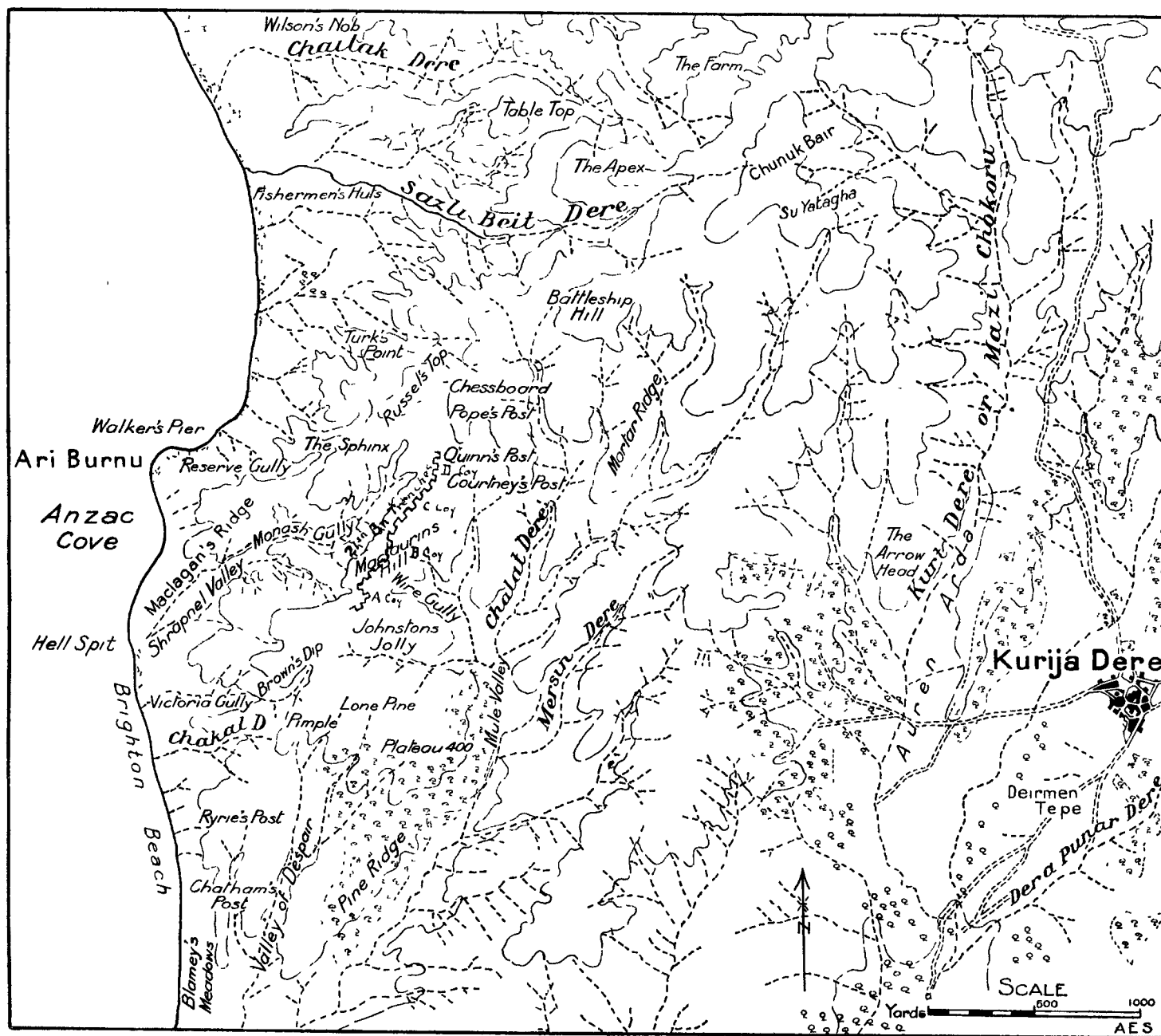
In passing it is interesting to note that the commander of the submarine published an account of this episode in a book of his war experiences. This book came into the hands of Capt. A. S. Robertson, of this unit, whilst

a prisoner of war in Germany. The German version is, in the main, accurate, with the exception that the author claims to have sunk the "Southland," and also that he came under heavy shell fire, whereas in reality only two shots were fired. The book in question is "U-Boot gegen U-Boot," by Oberleutnant H. von Heimburg.

We transhipped to the transport "Abassieh," on the evening of the 6th September, and were landed at Anzac Cove before midnight. Next day we took over the line which was to be our home for 3½ months. Battalion H Q was on the terraces behind Scott's Point. "A" and "B" Companies held the line from Wire Gully, on the right, where we joined the 22nd Battn. "C" Company occupied Steele's Post, and "D" Company Courtney's Post. On our left in Quinn's Post, was the 17th Battn. The situation was at a deadlock when we arrived, and remained so until the evacuation. Our casualties from enemy action were slight, but constant work in the front line, short rations and dirt, caused much sickness, and during our stay we dwindled from 1000 to 650 strong, even with the addition of our 3rd Reinforcements, who joined us on 11th October.

On the morning of the 17th October the Turks in front of Quinn's and Courtney's fraternised with our troops for about half an hour, during which time bully beef was exchanged for tobacco and other trifles. Part of our routine was to supply a Beach Fatigue party of 100 men. Although casualties with this party were more frequent than in the trenches, there was great competition to be included in it, when it changed monthly, on account of the extra freedom of movement out of the line.

At the beginning of November we shortened our front by handing over Steele's and Courtney's to the 18th Battn and taking over a short company front in the Tambour from the 22nd Battn. This enabled us to put 200 men on digging out the extensive tunnel system designed for our winter



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quarters During this month the weather, which had been perfect, turned cold, and on the night of the 26th November we experienced a blizzard On the 29th we suffered a heavy bombardment from the Turks, which was specially concentrated on Lone Pine, where the 23rd and 24th Battns and 13th Light Horse had heavy casualties

The 12th December saw us shifting out of the front row for the first time Two Companies went into the Pine ("A" and "B"), and the remainder of the Battalion went to Dead Man's Gully, to do the necessary engineering work preparatory to the evacuation

The main portion of the Battalion left the Peninsula from Watson's Pier during the night 18/19th December The remainder of 6 officers and 214 O R left during the night 19/20th The last two parties of 6 men each were under Capt Crowther and

Capt. Duggan, and left the front trenches at 2 30 a m and 2 48 a m respectively, on the 20th December, 1915 The Adjutant, Lt. A M Boothman, and the R M O., Capt. J. P Fogarty, also remained, and left with the last parties

We spent Christmas and New Year on Lemnos Island, where we were camped at West Mudros While here we received billies from Australia, and a very large mail The villages near the camp were very interesting, and we thoroughly enjoyed the experience of being able to stretch our legs after 3½ months continuously cooped up in trenches about 2½ feet wide and 8 to 10 feet deep

On the 4th January, 1916, we embarked on the "Ascanius," for Egypt, and arrived in Alexandria on the 7th January, after an uneventful trip

**III.**

**Egypt Again.**

We arrived at Tel-el-kebir in the midst of the first rain storm we had experienced in Egypt, and found that the few tents on our camping ground were occupied by our 4th, 5th and part of our 6th Reinforcements. After a few days, when we had sorted ourselves out, we found that we were in camp alongside the 1st Division. Both Divisions were complete with artillery, engineers and all divisional troops for the first time, our own divisional artillery and engineers having arrived from Australia to join us.

The Battalion stayed at Tel-el-kebir, training, till the 25th January, when the Division moved out to take over the Canal Zone defences. We travelled by train to Ismailia—Moascar, and marched to Ferry Post. Next day we marched from Ferry Post to our defensive position near Hog's Back, ten miles in a straight line. After consultation with some who took part in most of our marches, the writer unhesitatingly puts this down as the worst "promenade" we ever did. Every man was fully equipped, with extra ammunition, rations, and two blankets, in addition to the ordinary etceteras. When we reached the end, the "Q" department had failed, and we solaced ourselves on bully beef, biscuits and a very little water. And all this in the heat of the Egyptian sun, yes, it was some march.

Routine on the Sinai's Desert was strenuous. Training occupied our time by day, and one night in four each Company had a run on outpost duty. We owed a great deal of our efficiency in France to the six weeks spent guarding the Canal. In February the Brigade Machine Gun Company was formed, and the Battalion M G, Officer and Sergeant, attended a course of Lewis Gunnery at Ismailia.

Leaving the desert on 7th March, we went to camp at Moascar where we completed our divisional organisation for France, by the formation of a Pioneer Battalion, and each unit trained its own Lewis Gun section, with four guns to a Battalion. Among our new

equipment was the P H gas helmet, which was substituted for the old smoke helmet, and muslin respirator with which we were issued on the Peninsula. The Prince of Wales visited Moascar Camp at this time, and the 6th Brigade was the first Australian unit reviewed by him.

The early hours of 19th March found us in open trucks, in the rain once more, en route for Alexandria, where next day we embarked on the "Minnewaska" for Marseilles. The voyage was pleasant as regards weather, but nervy as regards submarines, and we were glad to tie up safely alongside a French wharf, on the afternoon of the 24th March.

The 2nd Division was the first Australian unit in France, except the Siege Artillery and the 1st Divisional Motor Transport. This being the case, our reception was exceptionally enthusiastic. During our three days' train journey from Marseilles to Aire, we were delighted by the sight of the green country side, the broad sweep of the Rhone, and the undoubted warmth of our welcome from the people.

We detrained at Aire on the 27th March and marched to our first billets in Glomingham, more rain. Thus early in our career we had established the precedent that the 21st Battalion moved either in the rain or on a Sunday. At Glomingham we were practised in route marching on hard roads again, a change after the desert, and put through a gas cloud. The 6th Light Trench Mortar Battery, our good friends throughout the war, came into being at this time. Their little weapon, the Stokes Mortar, at once took the fancy of us all, and ever since, when in trouble, we have called for the little guns, and found them at their posts. During our stay at Glomingham we were reviewed by Lord Kitchener.

On 4th April we marched towards the line at Fleurbaix, staying the first night at Haverskerque (13 miles), and the second at Saily (10 miles). The transport section accompanied the unit for the first time on this march. Previously they had been rather



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out of it, but from our arrival in France onwards, they were our constant and trusted companions. Come good, come bad, if the rations were obtainable, the transport got them up to us, and in the getting lost good men, and good horses, too. This march to the line can be classed in the second flight of marches, in line, that is to say, with the Arneke to Ovest Mont performance (21½ miles) in October, 1916 (our longest one day spin), and the Cappy to Doint fracas in September, 1918.

Once again the first Australian Infantry unit to take the plunge, we left Sully for the front line on the evening of 7th April, to take over from the 10th Battalion, Lincoln Regt. But that is starting on the next stage of our story.

En passant it may be of interest to enumerate the various first performances we have to our credit.

(1) First Australian Unit to garrison Cairo (Aug, '15).

(2) First Australian Unit to be torpedoed (2/9/15).

(3) First Australian unit to be reviewed by the Prince of Wales (18/3/16).

(4) First Australian Infantry in the line in France (7/4/16).

(5) And, finally, last Australian Infantry to come out of the line in France (6/10/18).

Our first days in France were happy days. Glad to be free from the drag of the desert; satisfied with the thought that we were now to take part in a campaign in which there was a possibility of warfare of movement, fit as fiddles, trained to a hair, and broken in to the sights, and sounds, of warfare; we were some Battalion. The idea of warfare of movement remained our dream for two more years before we actually saw it. Not till the summer of 1918 did we know the joy of having the Hun on the run. Our dreams were then justified, and as General Monash has said, we realised that there is no such a tonic for weary troops as success.

IV.

## Early Days in France.

Our first front line tour in France lasted six days, when we were relieved by the 22nd The Battalion held the line about 3 miles east of Fleurbaix, with Head Quarters at Wye Farm. The "trenches" were not trenches, but breastworks, and in bad repair. The sector was quiet, in fact had been quiet ever since the line had finally settled there early in 1915. The Germans had a great preponderance of guns and ammunition, or so it seemed to us. Luckily shelling was not violent, and it always took place according to plan, so that with a little knowledge of the ways of the wily Hun, danger could be easily avoided.

The Brigade was in the line for a month, during which time we did a second front line trip, spending the time out as left support Battalion. In the month of duty we left our mark on the sector in the way of engineering work, new support and reserve lines being constructed, and the front line repaired and wired.

The Brigade spent May as Divisional reserve, the 21st Battalion being billeted in, and near, Jesus Farm, on the River Lvs, just behind Erquinghem. Our work consisted of cable burying in the forward area at night, and mild training during the day. Most of the training was in the improved bayonet fighting and physical "jerks," which were introduced at this time. The weather was perfect, and the country looked beautiful. On the whole we voted that the war in France was a good war, particularly in the month of May, 1916.

On 29th May we moved to Rue Marle, to be nearer our cable burying work, and 11th June found us in the front row again, relieving the 25th Battn of the 7th Brigade. Our sector this time was from Bois Grenier on the right, to the Lille-Armentiere road, on the left. This sector was a little more noisy than Fleurbaix, our patrols being more active, and our artillery, having been given much more ammunition, started to strafe in real earnest. All the activity was preparatory to the Somme push on the 1st July, though we

did not know this at the time, not, in fact, until we read of it in the Continental "Daily Mail" on 3rd July.

June saw the start of the Australian raids. Modelled on the Canadian system, the 7th Brigade carried out a single point entry raid on 6th June, at the Rue de Bois salient. They were completely successful, and the 5th and 6th Brigades immediately commenced training special parties to carry on the good work. The 6th Brigade had next turn, and the 21st was given the job of providing covering parties in No Man's Land for the three other Battalions, each of which was to make an entry into the enemy trench. After a fortnight's special training, the party, consisting of about 250 all told (the first big raid by us in France), carried out their stunt at midnight on the night of 29/30th June. The barrage was good and all three parties reached the enemy trenches. The left party, consisting of 24th and 21st Battn men, were most successful, and brought back seven prisoners. In this action Sgt H Edwards won the Military Medal, the first one awarded to the unit. Our casualties were 2 killed and 3 or 4 wounded.

The Battalion had been relieved from the front line on 20th June by the 24th, and was back in Rue Marle again, when the Division was relieved by New Zealanders on 4th July, and marched to La Creche (7 miles), near Steenwerck. Here we billeted till the 8th, reorganising and equipping for our next move, which we knew was to be a momentous one, but which was very vague. Rumours had it that we were to make a new landing on the Belgian coast, to attack at Ypres, and to be used as shock troops on the Somme. Why "shock" troops we don't know to this day, as when we did get into heavy action, most of the shock was to our own nervous systems.

During the three months, April, May and June, 1916, we had received a good breaking-in to warfare as practised on the Western Front. Our 9th Reinforcements joined us, and the unit kept well up to strength, not

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being depleted by any disastrous actions, or suffering from bad weather or conditions.

At Fleurbaix and Armentieres, the precedent of the 21st and 22nd working together was established. Although all the units of the 6th Brigade have always been in closest sympathy with one another, it has nearly always been our lot to be relieved by the 22nd Battn, and vice versa. In our years in France, through repeatedly changing over with the same unit, both officers and men came to know and appreciate our sister Bat-

talion, and it is not out of place to record here our admiration and affection for our good friends, whose only fault was that they wore a red and purple diamond, instead of a red and black one.

Four days' march, during which we stayed at Strazeele (10½ miles), Eblinghem (11½ miles), and Campagne (5 miles), brought us to the railway at St Omer (5 miles), on the 11th July. We crowded into the train, "40 hommes" to a truck, and at 11 a.m. left, in the highest spirits, for a destination unknown.

**V.**

## **The First Battle of the Somme.**

Detraining at Longeaux siding near Amiens after a seven hours' tram ride, via Calais, Boulogne, Etaples and Abbeville, we marched 8 miles to billets at St Sauveur, where we stayed till the 16th July. Blankets were handed in, and practises in attack formations were carried out daily. By this time we knew our fate, and had to screw up our courage to face with a smile the certainty of entering the Somme push, on the heels of the 1st Division.

Marching by easy stages we reached Varennes (22 miles) on 20th July, via Villers-Bocage (8 miles), and Puchevillers (7 miles). Each day the roar of the battle came clearer to our ears. From Varennes we could see the shells bursting near Oivillers-la-Buiselle, and the unit would line up in the evening to watch the strafe. Equipment was fitted and refitted until we evolved the "fighting order," which lasted, with small modifications, throughout the campaign. We left Varennes for Albert at 5 a.m. on the 26th, on two hours' notice. This hurried move was typical of our earlier days as a Division, and was a contrast to the better organised and less hurried movements which took place in 1918. We shifted perhaps on shorter notice in 1918, but our training and experience enabled us to do it with less bustle and consequent loss of temper.

All day long we camped at the Albert Brickfields listening to stories of slaughter from the 1st Division men, and at 7 p.m. moved by platoons through the town to Sausage Valley, where we camped in the old German front line, in a rather disorganised state. Guns of all calibres were drawn up almost wheel to wheel all round, the noise was deafening, and it was hard to imagine that there was any system about the battle at all. For three days we acted as carrying battalion to the Brigade, moving up laden with rations, bombs, and S.A.A., through the murderous barrage which was kept on the Chalk Pit road and Pozieres village. In those days the art of counter battery shooting had not been invented as a science, and the poor old infantry were the target for all types of artillery. Of our trips along the so-called Kay Trench, which was really only a track among the shell holes, the less said the better. All troops were under observation by the Germans, from the time they cleared Casualty Corner, at the top of Sausage Valley, until they reached the

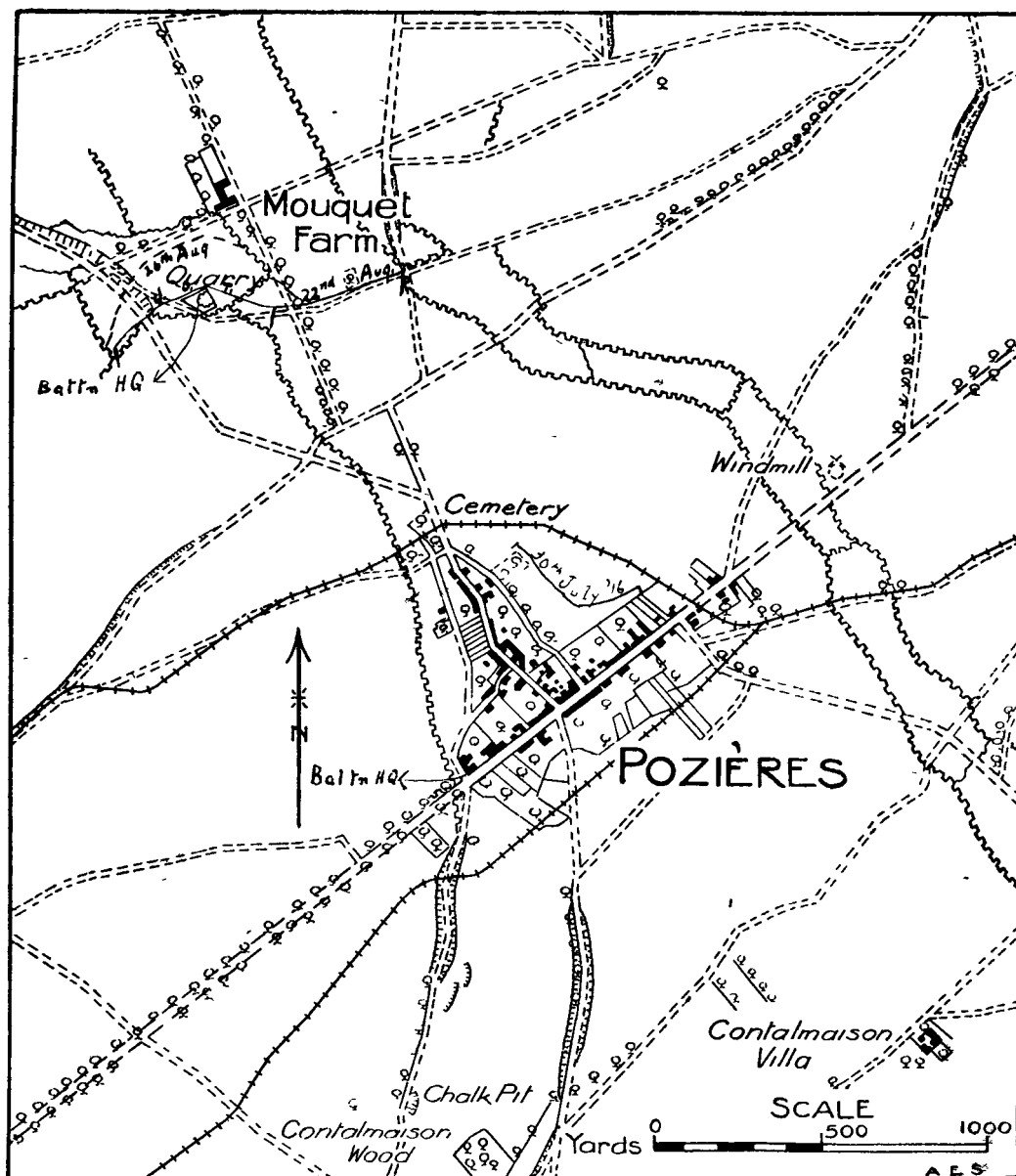
front line. The trenches on both sides were battered day and night with H.E. (high explosive), and the roads in addition received constant attention with shrapnel.

The one satisfaction was that the 1st Division had captured Pozieres village, and that we were holding it. Moving into the front line on the night 29/30th July, we had another rough passage in the village, but relief was complete by daylight. Our tour lasted three days, during which casualties were hardly as heavy as during the carrying period. "C" Company came off worst, having lost 60 men out of 140, by shelling alone, by the time we withdrew to support, and carrying again. The whole of this time preparations for an attack by the Division on Pozieres ridge were under way, and while in the line we dug a jumping-off trench half way across No Man's Land. This was a rather remarkable performance, as in one section of it 80 men dug 240 yards of trench, plus traverses, to a depth of 5 feet, between 9.15 p.m. and 3.45 a.m., under a very heavy fire. Lt-Col. Hutchinson was wounded during this tour in the line, and Major Forbes was appointed C.O., and promoted to Lt-Col.

The Division attacked the ridge at 9.15 p.m. on the 4th August, with all three infantry Brigades in the line. The 22nd took the brunt of the fighting for the 6th Brigade, followed by the 24th and 23rd, with the 21st carrying. The action was successful, and from the new line in O.G. 2 (the official name of our final objective) an extensive view towards Bapaume was obtained with Courcellette and Martinpich in the foreground. The main job to be done in the succeeding days was stretcher-bearing, as the casualties were heavy. At 3 p.m. on the 6th August the 6th Brigade was relieved by the 4th Brigade, of the 4th Division, and moved back to Tara Hill for the night. Here we were again disturbed by shelling, which cost the 24th Battalion the lives of four of its headquarters staff, besides inflicting a number of other casualties and spoiling our night's rest completely.

Moving by road, as usual, we reached Berteaucourt (29 miles), via Warloy (9 miles) and La Vicogne (12 miles), on the 11th. Here we stayed training, reorganising, and resting for six days. By this time we had absorbed our 9th and 10th Reinforcements who had been arriving from the base in small





To face Page 15.

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parties for a couple of months. While at Vadencourt, on the way to La Vicogne, the Brigade was inspected by His Majesty the King.

On the 18th we started back for the line, this time staging at La Vicogne, Rubempre and Vadencourt, and arrived in Wire Trench, behind Pozieres, at 8 a.m. on the 22nd. That night "A," "C" and "D" Companies took over the line from the remnants of the 3rd Brigade, on the right of Mouquet Farm. It was a thick night, and conditions remained hot until we changed over with the 24th on our left 2 days later, and found ourselves confronting the redoubtable Farm itself, with our Company headquarters and centre of resistance in the Mouquet Farm Quarry. In this sector shell fire was even hotter than where we had come from. Knowing that we were next for a stunt we were not surprised when we received orders to attack the Farm, on 26th. "A" Company, from supports, and "B" Company from salvage work, were brought up to form the point of the arrow. "C" and "D" Companies had been holding the line since the 22nd, and made the preliminary reconnaissances and provided supports and carrying parties. The 24th assisted on the right, and the sadly depleted 22nd sent up a Company to form a defensive flank on the left, towards Thiepval.

The barrage opened at 4.45 a.m., on the 26th August, and "A" Company, with its right on the Farm, and "B" Company with its left on Point 54, assaulted on a 500 yards front. The Hun, protected in deep dugouts, and reinforced by supports housed in an extensive underground system under Mouquet Farm orchard, fought well. Our "A" Company, attracted by the flares, and noise from the ruins of the Farm buildings, lost direction to the right, and became hopelessly mixed up among the maze of trenches round and beyond their objective. Fighting like tigers, many men got past their objective, and when daylight broke were shot down by the enemy, and some were captured. All the "A" Company officers were lost, but the remnants of the Company hung on to a line passing just in front of the Farm, and connected up with the 24th on their right, and "B" Company on their left, during the day.

"B" Company, on the left, had better luck, and although badly mauled about, took a large toll of the enemy, and established themselves on their objective except on the extreme left, where point 54 held out. During the day the Huns reinforced from Thiepval, and our Stokes mortars played havoc with them

coming down a communication trench, finally driving them back over the open, minus their rifles and equipment, when our machine guns and rifles knocked out many more.

The 24th, on our right, became embroiled in the fighting round the ruins, and were not sorted out until the evening. The 22nd Company, on the left flank, not knowing the sector, also lost direction, but assisted greatly in whatever fighting they found themselves. Several attempts were made on Point 54 during the morning, but our numbers were depleted, and it was impossible to get a strong enough party together to overcome this formidable position.

On the same night (26/27th) we were relieved by the 14th Battalion, and the newly won territory was handed over. On relief the unit moved direct to Albert, where we were rejoined by the details who had been left behind.

This action was typical of the Somme Push in 1916. The Hun was holding the position in strength, had plenty of guns, and was fighting in good heart. Our troops were as yet inexperienced, and the staff work was not at the high pitch of efficiency which it attained in the latter days of the war. The results were heavy losses on both sides, and comparatively small territorial gain for us, but above all the establishment in our hearts of the fact that man for man we were better than our opponents. Hence, though the material gain was small, the First Battle of the Somme was a turning point of the war, as it showed that, given equal chances, we were the better side. From July, 1916, till March, 1918, the German army, as a whole, was on the defensive for the first time since the battle of the Marne.

We have been in hotter holes since then, but never has the Battalion suffered under intense shell fire for such long periods, and with such little movement. The casualty lists bear this out. The conditions were vile. The weather being hot and everyone fully occupied on other tasks, the dead lay unburied for weeks, and the stench was frightful. To come through a period such as this, and then go on fighting, is evidence of the temper of the British armies in general, and of our unit in particular. In later pages the reader will learn of more spectacular accomplishments, but under the heading of the First Battle of the Somme is told the story of our first and heaviest try out, and the time which is most vividly imprinted in the memories of those who saw the whole show through.

**VI.**

**Winter in the Line.**

Until 3rd September we stayed at Bonneville, having reached there by a three days' march from Albert via Warloy and Herissart. The Battalion at this time numbered 11 officers and 491 other ranks all told, our casualties during the Pozieres-Mouquet Farm operations being —

Officers Killed, 9, wounded, 14, missing, 1 (P O W ) ; total, 24

Other Ranks Killed, 61, wounded, 459, missing, 131, total, 651

We never again in France, regained our full strength of 970 odd, the nearest we got being before the Ypres offensive in September, 1917, after a summer out of the line

On September 3rd we marched to Ghezincourt, and on the 5th entrained at Doullens South for Proven, in Belgium, marching thence to St Lawrence Camp, via Poperinghe, the same evening. On the 14th we moved to Toronto Camp, where ensued a month's rest and training. Sports between units were inaugurated for the first time, and the troops picked up wonderfully after the gruelling of the previous month

On the 14th October we relieved the 22nd Battalion in the front line at Hill 60, the move up being by train to Ypres, and then via Lille Gate. The tour of duty was quiet, but we had our first taste of mud, as rain fell continuously for 36 hours. The position at Ypres is too well known to need further explanation, than to say that to walk to the line at night gave one the impression that the Huns completely encircled us, as their flares seemed to come from all round

Relieved on the 19th October by the 24th London Regt, we entrained at Ypres for Godewaersvelde, and marched to Watou. The succeeding days we marched to Arneke, Ovest Mont (21½ miles, mentioned previously), and St Omer, where we entrained for the South (Longpre, near Amiens), finally billeting at L'Etoile at 11 p.m. on the 22nd. The troops were foot sore, and rested till the 26th, when we marched to Mouflers, and thence by buses to Heilly, billeting at Barresur-Ancre

From Buire on the 3rd November we pushed out into the sea of mud, which was the Somme battlefield of a month before. The rains during the previous month had made conditions indescribable. The photographs published give no idea of the sodden, cheerless, and filthy trenches and shell holes in which the British Army on the Somme fought and worked in the winter of 1916-17. Neither have we space in this short account to describe the battle with the mud in any detail. Honours are divided between our first trip into Flers, in November, and the Christmas tour at Guedecourt, with a slight shade of odds in favour of Flers, as the roughest trip, mainly because it lasted longer without any relaxation, even of the Nissen Hut variety. Except during the 7th Brigade stunt on November 5th, at Bayonet Trench, there was little enemy activity. The mud evidently had him worried, too. It will suffice to enumerate our movements for the next four months, as they were all similar, each day being only as dreary as the day before

We were in the front line at Flers from 3rd to 7th, and 15th to 19th November, and finally the Brigade was withdrawn from the front area on the 22nd, after a very sticky month, of which Carlton Camp, Cobham Trench, and Factory Corner are sufficient reminders. After a few days at Meaulte and Dernancourt, the Division moved by train to the Vignacourt area on the 1st December, for a fortnight's spell. We were billeted in Flesselles with the rest of our Brigade, where we enjoyed comparative comfort, and also saw our first snow. Moving up by train on the 17th, we took over the supports, via Ribemont and Mametz, from the 57th Battalion, 15th Infantry Brigade, on the 21st and the front line from the 59th Battalion the following night. The sector was in front of Guedecourt and Les Boeufs, and looked across a valley to Le Transloy and Beaulencourt. We spent Xmas Day in the line, being then relieved by the 22nd Battalion, and stayed in the area until the 16th Jan-

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uary, 1917. Our time was evenly divided between the front line, Needle Trench supports, and the camps at Trones and Bernafay Woods, near Montauban, spending four days in turn at each place. We did three front line tours, being finally relieved by the 8th Infantry Brigade.

On the 17th the Division moved by train to Ribemont area, where we were in reserve till 1st February. During the latter half of January heavy frost set in, which lasted till the end of February. Roads became bad, and most of our time was spent mending them; in fact, Battalion H Q was moved to Cinque Ports Camp, Bazentin, to be nearer the scene of operations.

On the 5th February the Division took over the line astride the Albert-Bapaume road, at the Butte de Warlencourt, our Battalion first being in reserve at Pioneer Camp, and then took over the front line in the right sector at Le Sars, from the 8th to 13th February. After a stay as reserve Brigade at Scott's Redoubt, we went forward to Bazentin area, Acid Drop Camp. On the 22nd we relieved the 24th Battalion in the left sector,

at Le Sars, and were in the front line when the German retirement commenced on the night 24/25th February.

During this period we had our first introduction to gum boots, and "trench foot." The gum boots became battalion stores on moving into the line, and many arguments occurred when it came to claiming one's own leather boots when we moved out. "Trench foot" is an ailment caused by the combined effects of cold, wet, and dirt, and results in a swelling of the feet, which is very painful, and sometimes necessitates amputation. Various antidotes, such as rubbing and bathing the feet were instituted with good results, but "trench foot" was never by any means eliminated.

The frost broke up in the last week in February, and conditions of transport became worse than ever. This, synchronising with the German retirement, greatly hampered our movements, and in a great part explains how the Hun managed to do such a clean get-away. This retirement, which led up to Bullecourt, will be dealt with in the following chapter.



**VII.**

**From the Butte to Bullecourt.**

The Hun retirement was carried out in consequence of the bad tactical position into which he was forced by the Somme offensive, and to shorten his line. We had long known of the existence of the Hindenburg Line, to which he fell back, and consequently the withdrawal was not altogether a surprise, though at the time it was quickly and skilfully done. The weather and the state of the country, in addition to the enemy's "booby traps," made our pursuit very hard.

The first enemy movement took place on the night 24/25th February, and was betrayed by the extremely long range action of his artillery. The Battalion moved over the top, and crawled through the mud to Gallwitz Trench, only meeting resistance at one point, where a fight ensued. Patrols sent out in the early morning fog located the enemy in Malt Trench, and, no artillery support being available, we stayed at Gallwitz Trench till relieved by the 28th Battalion, 7th Infantry Brigade, on the night of the 26th. We moved back to Scott's Redoubt, and Sussex Camp, and on the 4th March went into Seven Elms, near Martinpuich, to relieve the 24th. The 7th March saw us in close support in Le Barque Switch, and on the 10th we relieved the 22nd in the front line astride the Albert Bapaume road. At midnight on 12/13th a patrol, after repeated attempts, entered Warlencourt Trench, and the Battalion moved forward to garrison the captured position. The same morning Grevillers was patrolled and occupied by 9.20 a.m., in spite of sniping, and minewerfer opposition. The 5th Brigade relieved us on the night 14/15th, and after only a day's rest at Bazeutin, we were sent forward again, and entered Bapaume on the heels of the first troops through the town (6th and 8th Brigades) on the 17th March. The 6th Brigade remained in the van, with the 21st relieving the 23rd Battalion as advanced guard. We advanced in artillery formation without trouble through Beugnatre, our right Company gaining contact with the enemy at Vaulx-Vraucourt. By midnight our patrols

had taken this village also, with the rest of the Battalion entrenched between there and Beugnatre. Much enemy movement was observed next day, but owing to the speed of the advance our artillery was not up in sufficient strength to properly deal with it.

Concentrating on the night 18/19th March we were ordered to attack Noreuil and Longatte, in company with the 23rd Battalion. We had the left sector, and advanced from Vaulx-Vraucourt at 4.15 a.m. on the 19th. The less said about this show the better, as the enemy were in much greater strength than we imagined, and both Battalions were caught in the open, under long range machine gun and artillery fire. We had no artillery support, and after suffering heavy casualties had to be content with digging in 1000 yards short of the villages which were our objectives. Although we did not reach Longatte, the attack, as carried out, was an impossible affair, and the unit can be proud of getting as far as it did, and then not losing any ground. The fact that the Australians never lost any ground, once captured and consolidated, is one of the facts which the Australian public has not up to the present fully realised the significance of.

The 26th Battalion relieved us on the same night, and the Brigade was withdrawn to Le Coupe Geule, and on the 26th March the Division came back into huts around Mametz until the 13th April. For the following fortnight we were in reserve in front of Vaulx-Vraucourt. The 4th Division having been badly cut to pieces after penetrating the Hindenburg line between Bullecourt and Queant, the 2nd Division was trained up for the job. On the night of the 30/31st April, our preparations being complete, we took over the front line at Raencourt from the 26th Battalion.

The plan of attack was, as far as our Brigade was concerned, bold, to say the least of it. The fact that in the attack we were the only Brigade, out of several Divisions, to break and hold the Hindenburg line, fully justified our Brigadier's (Gen. Gellibrand)

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daring dispositions In the early hours of the 3rd May the whole Brigade formed up on tapes half way across No Man's Land, which was 1000 yards wide The 24th and 22nd Battalions formed the first four waves, and the 23rd and 21st, the second four Our left flank was just clear of the Bullecourt Village and the Brigade front was 800 yards On the right was the 5th Brigade of our own Division, on the left the 62nd (English) Division, whose sector included Bullecourt itself

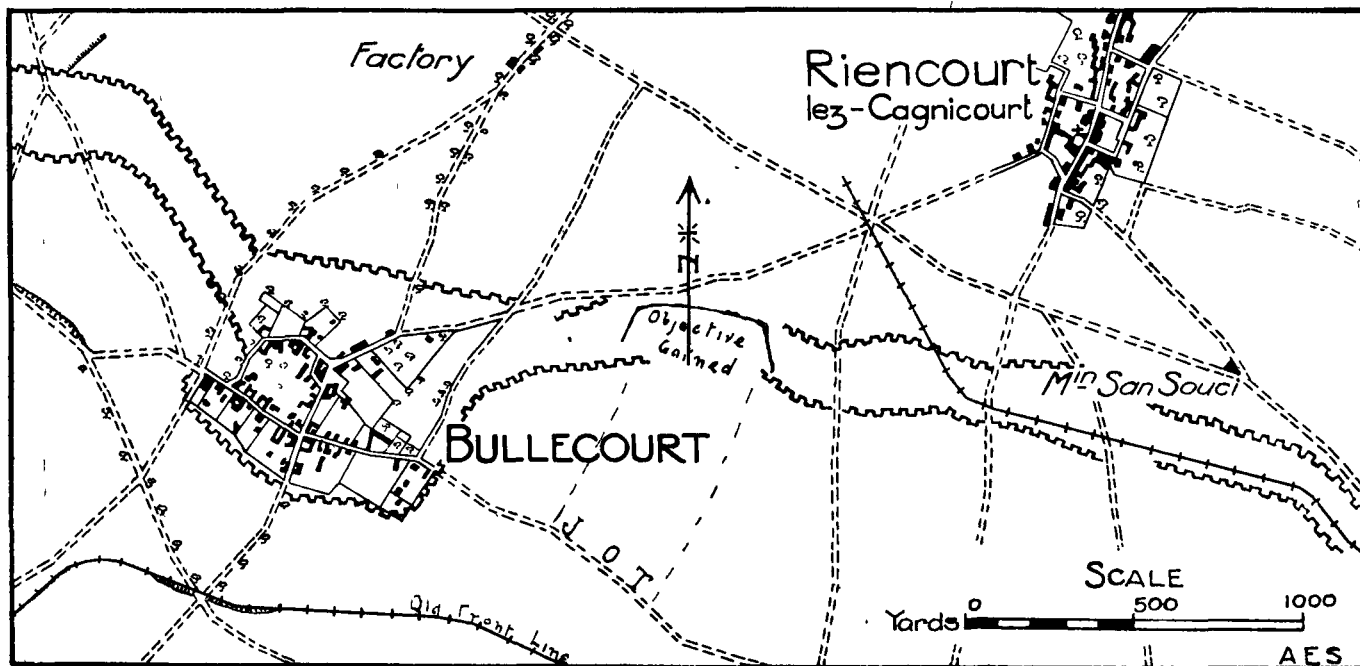
The first feature of the attack was the enemy's barrage, which opened at 3 30 a m, a quarter of an hour before ours Nevertheless, the brigade went through to O G 2, our battalion finishing up in its proper place, in the van on the left As stated before, the troops on both flanks were thrown back, which left the 6th Brigade in a very precarious position, especially as the Huns were fighting strongly with bombs from flank and front, and machine guns hidden in cellars in Bullecourt itself made movement over the top extremely dangerous Added to this, the H E shelling, particularly on our communications, and the railway embankment, which had been the old front line, was as intense as we have ever experienced

The Hun counter attacked, mainly with bombs from the flanks, all day, but without success, and at 5 a m next morning a sadly depleted 6th Brigade was relieved by the 1st Brigade, and went to the railway embankment for another twenty-four hours' artillery strafe We were then relieved by the 3rd Brigade, and moved to the Noreuil-Longatte Road The situation gradually assumed normal aspect, and on the 8th we moved to camp at Le Sars

Bullecourt stands out clear in black and white as a 6th Infantry Brigade achievement We have played our part in other great victories, such as Pozieres, Mont St Quentin, and Montbrehain, to mention a few, but in none has the calibre of our four Victorian battalions shown itself so superb on the day of conflict It was a costly victory, but it set the seal on the 6th Brigade's reputation as a fighting unit, which reputation was justified right through till the Armistice was granted eighteen months later

Our casualties during the operations recounted in this chapter were —

	Killed	Wounded	Missing	Total
Officers	10	14	—	24
Other ranks	57	417	60	534



**VIII.**

**The Summer of 1917.**

Leaving Le Sars on the morning of the 9th May, we marched straight to Mametz Camp. The 2nd Division, in fact, the whole Corps, was withdrawn during the next few days, and we started on our first spell as a Corps. A week at Mametz sufficed to rub the rough edges off our appearance, so that when we moved to Millencourt, on the 17th, via Méaulte, Ville-sur-Sucre, Buire, and Lavieville, the Battalion had recovered its old swing.

Millencourt proved a good home. The summer months provided perfect weather, as they had in the previous year. Training was carried out mainly in Lewis gun work and musketry, a full size range being constructed. We were here billeted, and working in country which in 1918 became our battlefield. The knowledge gained of the locality, in addition to what we knew of it already, proved of inestimable value when we were called upon to hold up the enemy on the self-same hill overlooking Albert the following April. During May we were extensively reinforced from England, and companies began to look like companies again. Brigade sports and football matches were held. The sports meeting at Henencourt Wood, where the terraces provided a natural grandstand, was an afternoon's enjoyment which carried us far from thoughts of war.

On the whole, we were disappointed when ordered to entrain at Varennes for the Bapaume district on the 15th June. Whilst at Millencourt, our C O (Lieut-Col Forbes) was sent to England for duty at the Training Battalion, and Major Duggan rejoined from England, and took over command, with the rank of Lieut-Colonel. Colonel Duggan retained command of the Battalion until disbanded in October, 1918.

When we arrived at Bapaume and had settled down under canvas near Beaulencourt, we found that our shift had been for the better. The weather was perfect, we had the Divisional Baths next door, and soon constructed a matting cricket pitch. The ruined villages of Beaulencourt, Le Transloy, Villers-au-Flos, Haplincourt, and many others provided an ideal training ground, where

something like the real thing could be practised. Our field days aroused the keenest interest in the troops, who increased in efficiency and morale daily. Work was usually over by mid-day, and the afternoons were devoted to sports, cricket having the largest following. Many took the opportunity of revisiting our battlefield of the previous winter, and of viewing our old positions as the Hun had seen them from his old line.

Small drafts of reinforcements continued to arrive, so that towards the end of July we expected to move back to the line any day. Our move came on the 24th July, after a six weeks' summer camp, when we marched to Avelny, and a few days later entrained for the north, arriving in Campagne, near St Omer, late on the 28th.

But we were not for the line yet, and stayed in billets till the 12th September. Campagne proved as good a home as Beaulencourt, if not a bit better, as we were right alongside the Canal Neufosse, where a Brigade swimming carnival was held. Also, being near St Omer, leave was granted which enabled us to catch glimpses of civilisation again, besides which the inhabitants of our own village were very hospitable. We always found that the civilians in the St Omer-Armentieres region were much easier to get on with than those on the Somme or round Ypres.

In September we heard rumblings in the north-east, and knew we were for it. Leaving at 5.30 a.m. on the 12th, we were billeted in Steenvoorde by 3 p.m., via Renescure, Ebblinghem, Staple and St Sylvestre. Next day we marched to Dominion Camp, near Reninghelst, via Abeele. Here we had our first taste of regular aeroplane bombing, and all huts were surrounded by banks of earth to localise the explosions. On the 16th we moved again, this time to the Halifax Area, and on the 19th to the Canal Area, outside Ypres. At 7.40 a.m. on the 20th, we moved to China Wall as reserve for a Divisional attack, which, being successful to our great satisfaction, left us without further shifting.

Our Division was by now well embroiled in the fighting, and we will leave our part in the Third Battle of Ypres to the next chapter.



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### **IX.**

## **The Third Battle of Ypres.**

On the night 21-22nd September, we relieved the 18th Battalion (5th Brigade) in the left sector in front of Garter Point. We spent an inactive, but wet, time in the front row until relieved by the 32nd Battalion (5th Division) on the night 23-24th, when we marched back to Dominion Camp (10 miles). Here we stood to under orders for an hour's notice from the 26th till the 28th, but did not finally move till early morning on the 30th, when we billeted in what was left of the Infantry Barracks, Ypres, by 10 30 a m.

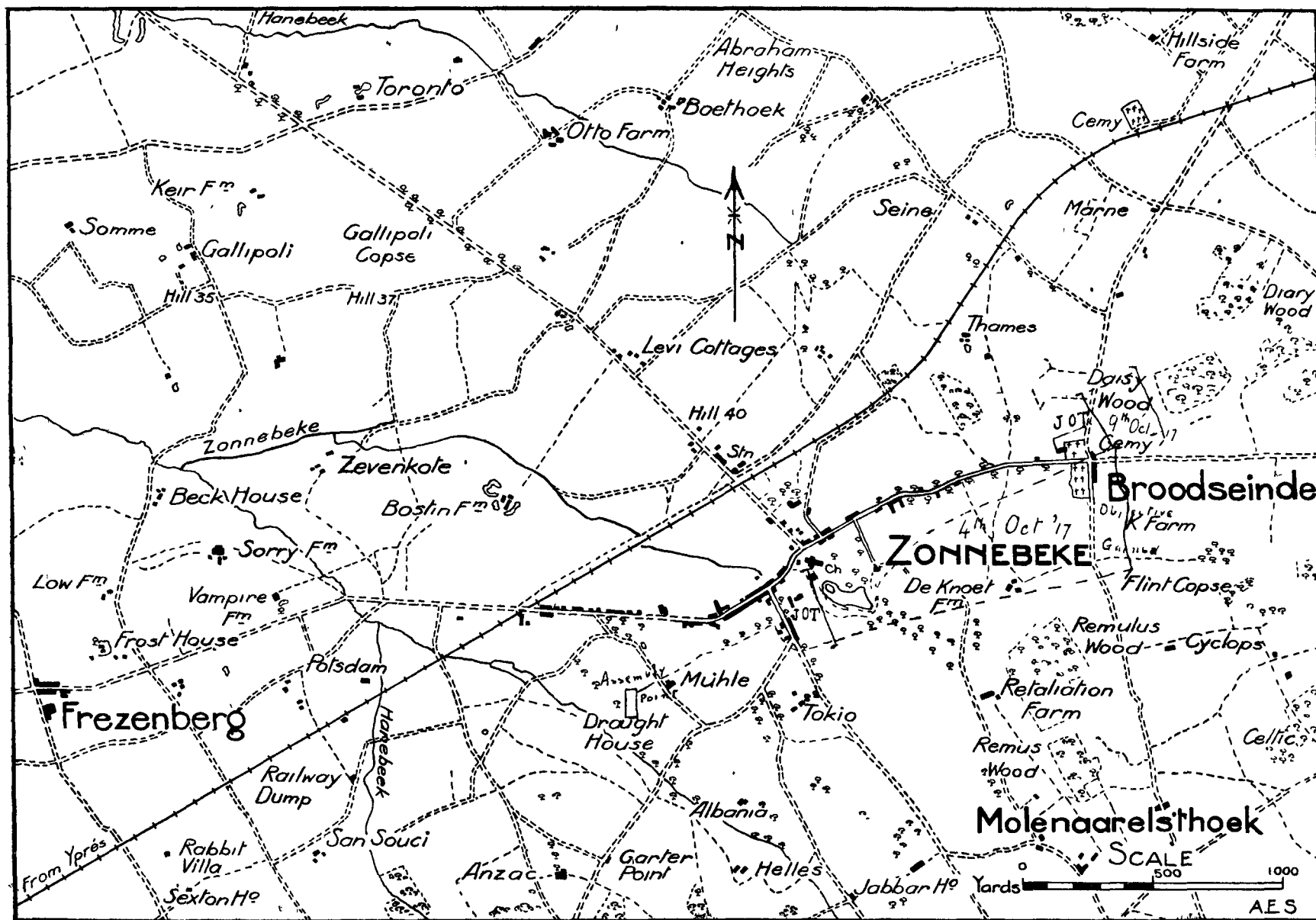
Our next move was to take part in the assault on Broodseinde Ridge, in conjunction with the 1st and 3rd Australian Divisions, with several other divisions on right and left. The attack was part of a right flanking movement preparatory to the attack on Passchendaele, which was carried out by the Canadians. We spent the 3rd of October in Gordon Area, just south of Ypres, making final preparations, and promulgating orders, and the same night moved forward to our assembly position in a valley behind Garter Point, and about a mile north of Hooze. At 3 10 a m. on the 4th, we set out for the J O T (Jumping Off Tape), arriving an hour before Zero, which was at 6 a m. The Huns put down a murderous barrage thirty-five minutes before ours started, we found out as the attack progressed that he intended to attack at the same Zero hour as we did. That he used a thirty-five minute barrage indicates his different method of fighting, and also the fact that when Zero hour came it was the British who advanced and not the Hun, shows the difference in the mettle of the opposing sides.

In spite of units being disorganised by the pre-Zero bombardment and all signalling gear having been destroyed, our lines advanced from a position near Garter Point to the 2nd Objective on the forward slope of Broodseinde Ridge, a distance of nearly two miles, by far the greatest advance we had ever made.

The main characteristics of the battle were the pre-Zero German bombardment, which forced our troops right forward through our own barrage, and the new experience of encountering "pill boxes." This pill box method of defence is very effective as long as the whole system hangs out, but as soon as one or two are captured or put out of action, the others can be approached from their "blind spot," which is no longer covered by machine gun fire from the flank. The troops quickly discovered this weakness and took full advantage of it. It was a fair battle, the enemy having the advantage of half an hour's concentrated artillery fire on our lines, but the fact that we reached our objectives according to plan, and held or improved them, speaks for itself. Our casualties would not have been heavy, but for the towelling up we got on the tape, which caused heavy losses while it lasted.

We remained in the line consolidating till the night 5-6th, when the 18th Battalion relieved us, and we moved to reserve at Kit and Kat, in the old front line. We only stayed here till the afternoon of the 7th, when we relieved part of the 20th Battalion in support at De Knoet Farm. The Brigade was very low in strength, and orders were issued to attack as a composite battalion on the morning of the 9th. The 21st Battalion was to provide a composite company of six platoons, with nine officers. This show, known as the "Daisy Wood Stunt," or the "9th of October," was another of our worst experiences. Rain had fallen, and the ground was muddy. Our artillery, or most of it, had been bogged, and was unable to put over anything but a meagre barrage. The only purpose the barrage served was to let the enemy know we were coming.

Zero was at 5 20 a m., and the J O T on the line of our previous advance. All officers became casualties early in the engagement, and the remainder of the action was carried on by the N C O's, with a mere handful of men. We reached the outskirts of Daisy



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Wood and Busy Wood as a very disorganised brigade, but working from shell hole to shell hole, the position was held under exceptionally heavy machine gun and sniping fire. By 8.45 a.m., what was left of the Brigade was roughly on its objective, and the 7th Brigade, coming up in support, made the position more secure. The Brigade was relieved by the 49th Battalion (4th Division) the same night, and was collected and reorganised as a composite battalion in the old support line. On the 10th October, the composite battalion was withdrawn to the Canal Area at Ypres, arriving about 11 p.m.

On the morning of the 12th, the unit entrained at Ypres for Abeele, and marched thence to billets in the Steenvoorde Area. We stayed here reorganising, training, playing games, and cleaning up till the 27th October. The whole Division was depleted, and reinforcements were sent from England, as quickly as they became available. Rain fell throughout the month, and the mud was ankle deep round the billets. On 2nd November we moved to camp in the Swan Area, Ypres, where the conditions were even worse,

and on the 7th November relieved the 18th Battalion in supports at Garter Point, the Division having once more taken over the line. For four days we worked on carrying parties, and cleaning up the area, when the Division was relieved, the 6th Battalion, West Yorks. Regiment, taking over our position, and we moved back to the Swan Area once more.

This was our final tour in the Ypres sector, and on the morning of the 12th November we marched to billets near Wippenhoek. Ypres in the autumn of 1917 was an area of muddy shell holes, over which the only paths were corduroy roads, and duckboard tracks. These were all well registered by the enemy, and movement was difficult in the forward areas. The battle on the 4th October was a triumph, as also was the following show on the 9th; both, however, cost us dearly. In the two shows we lost particularly heavily in officers, thirteen being killed outright. The casualties for this period were —

	Killed	Wounded	Missing	Total
Officers	10	10	3	23
Other ranks	62	330	24	416

**X.**

**Winter in the Ploegsteert Sector.**

On the 18th November, we left the Ypres Area for the last time, and marched to Doncaster Huts, Loere, where we stayed for a month. The weather was as fair as could be expected for this time of the year, and training and sports occupied our time. We moved to Bulford Camp, near Neuve Eglise, on the 15th December, two companies having preceded the rest of the Battalion to take over the Nucleus Garrisons in the Ploegsteert Area on the same day.

On the 20th, Battalion Headquarters moved to the Catacombs in Hill 63, just north-west of Ploegsteert Wood. We were here in reserve till the 12th January, the 2nd Division having relieved the 3rd Division in this sector. Work consisted of improving the reserve lines of defence from Hill 63 forward, and entailed the handling of much barbed wire. Snow fell daily, and just before Christmas a frost set in. It was not as severe as the frost of the previous January, and as we were living in the Catacombs, there was a chance to get warm in bed, if nowhere else. The Catacombs were a series of tunnels under Hill 63, which had been constructed to hold two battalions before the Messines show in June, 1917. There were double tiers of bunks throughout, also cubicles for offices, stores, etc. Christmas and New Year passed uneventfully, and a thaw set in on 6th January, 1918, which made conditions underfoot much worse than they had previously been. The 23rd Battalion relieved us on the 12th January, when we entrained at Hyde Park corner for Romarin, a few miles further back. We worked on engineering parties, when the snow permitted, until the 21st, when we were taken up by train again to relieve the 22nd Battalion in the front line. We were holding Le Basse Ville while the enemy in front of us was well dug-in in Warneton. The River Lys covered our right flank, where things were quiet.

This sector was mainly notable for mud and minenwerfers. The official photographer has done us the honour of publishing the por-

trait of one of the Battalion struggling in a support trench during this tour of duty. Our front line consisted of shell hole posts. The supports lived in cellars in Le Basse Ville, and in trenches behind the village. We were relieved by the 37th Battalion (3rd Division) on the night 27-28th January, and moved back to billets in Neuve Eglise. The Division was withdrawn, and on the 30th we travelled by train to the Bulescamp Area, 20 miles east of Boulogne. We were billeted over the three villages of Bulescamp, Harlettes, and Fromentels. During our month here, leave to Boulogne was granted and troops travelled in by motor lorry. We were situated at a high altitude, and when the sun shone had an excellent view of the surrounding country. The rest was a welcome one, and was occupied, as usual, with training and sports. We built a rifle range on which we had good musketry practice.

March opened with more snow, and this, as usual, was the signal for us to move to the line again, which we did by train on the 6th. The following day we marched from Romarin, and took over the Catacombs once more from the 3rd Division. Engineering parties occupied our time in reserve, most of the work consisting of duckboarding the forward trenches. On the night 15-16th we relieved the 22nd Battalion in the old sector at Le Basse Ville, which had not got less muddy in our absence. The C.T. (communication trench), Ultimo Avenue, however, had been improved, so that conditions were better than in January, though the "minnie" fire had increased. The cellars in Warneton must have each held at least one of these infernal bomb throwers. They were too close for our heavy artillery to deal with, and the field guns could only silence them temporarily. Their activity culminated at 3.15 a.m. on 22nd March, in a raid on our left Company's front line posts, which was preceded by a quarter of an hour's intense bombardment. The Hun scuppered our three left posts, taking a few prisoners from

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No 8 post, but was prevented from entering Le Basse Ville by No 6 post, which inflicted casualties on the attacking party

As soon as it was realised what was happening a party from Le Basse Ville went forward, recaptured one prisoner from the enemy as he was being taken across "No Man's Land," and re-established our front line positions. Nos 7, 8, and 9 posts were obliterated by "minnie" fire. Lieut O'Brien being found half buried, and with a revolver shot through his head. In casualties, both sides came out about even, which, considering that the enemy used 150 men in his raid (information from a prisoner taken), and worked under an exceedingly heavy artillery barrage, we came out rather well. We retaliated next night by gassing Warneton till there was not a flare fired from it, and the following day stretcher-bearers were seen working for several hours.

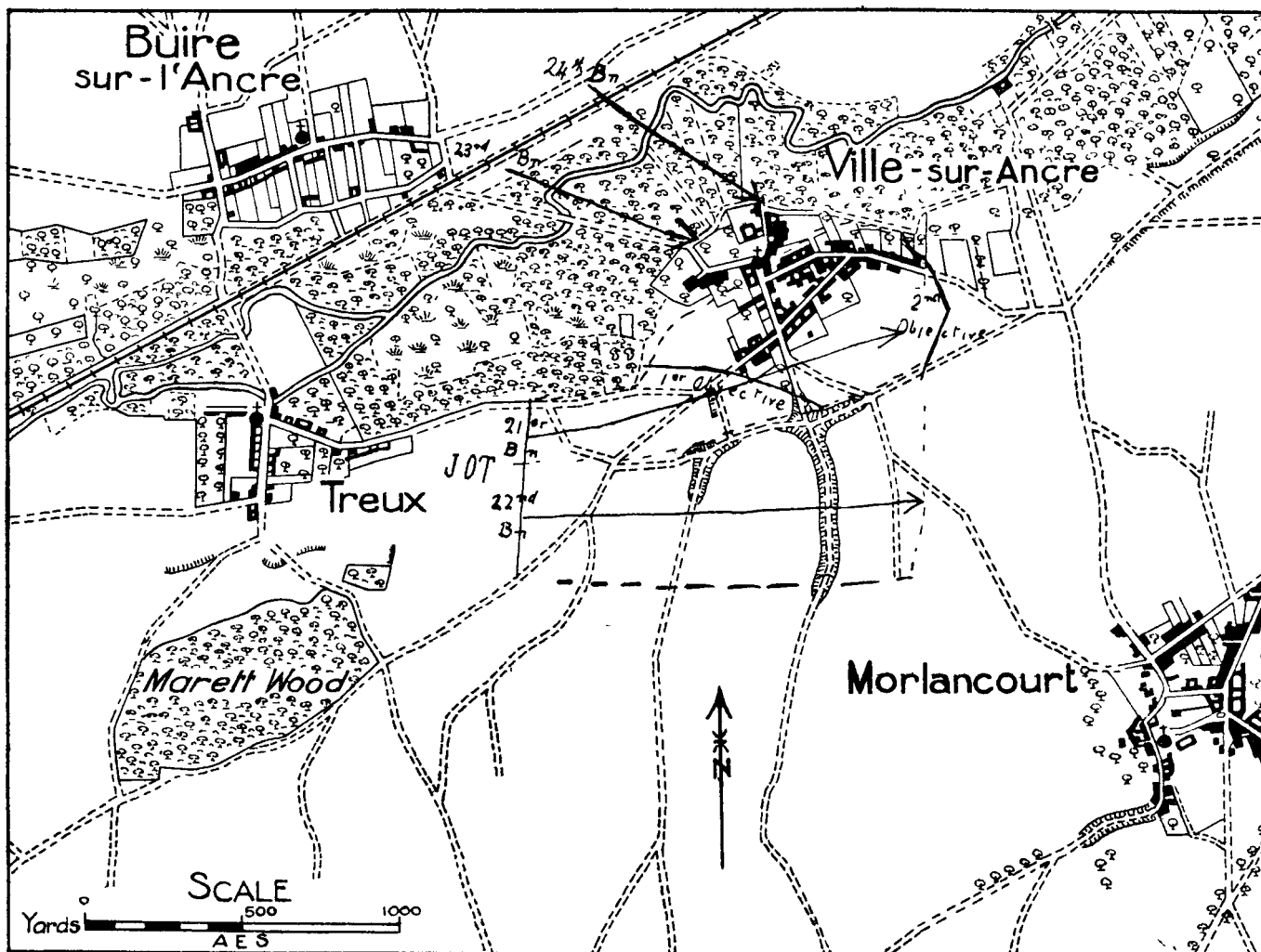
All this was part of the Hun's great Spring offensive of 1918. We had been expecting it to come for weeks, but only when we were relieved by the 22nd Battalion on the night 23-24th March did we learn of the great magnitude of his attack on the Somme. We certainly felt uneasy as we heard of retirement after retirement, and when the 4th Australian Division moved from reserve, followed by the 3rd and 5th Divisions, we just gritted our teeth and decided that whatever happened it would not be our fault if the Huns broke the line.

We left the Catacombs on the 2nd April, and embussed at Neuve Eglise for Meteren,

where we stayed till the morning of the 4th. The 3rd was a beautiful day, and was spent in inspection parades and discussions on the situation down south. The writer has never known the Battalion to be so resolutely determined to give a good account of itself. As an instance, in one Company, at any rate, when an inspection of iron rations was held, every man produced 24 hours' rations complete. Where they had got them from, being just out of the line, is a mystery, but the fact remains, and is a testimony to the earnestness with which all ranks approached their next job.

Though it did not look like it, as we lay in the sun at Meteren, our time of triumph had come. We were on the threshold of the "final campaign," the story of which is told so ably by Mr F. M. Cutlack, in his book on the 1918 operations. In 1915, 1916, and 1917, we had been fighting at a deadlock. Certainly we had gained many moral victories, and a certain amount of ground, but in our last year we were to know the satisfaction of beating the Hun, company to company, platoon to platoon, and man to man. It entailed heavy fighting, but it was worth it. Those who saw the Australian campaign from start to finish can never forget the last Spring and Summer. As we have said earlier in our story, it was what we had come for, lived for, and, if necessity arose, were prepared to die for.

Mr Cutlack has told the story truthfully, and in much detail, so again our aim will be merely to enumerate our movements in the Australians' Final Campaign.



## **"THE STORY OF THE TWENTY-FIRST."**

### **XI.**

## **The Somme, 1918.**

We arrived at St Roch Station, Amiens, at 6 30 a.m., 5th April, and marched to billets at Coisy. Amiens was not the town we had known of old, being almost deserted, and marked with the desolation of war. Early next morning we were taken in buses to La Houssoye on the main Albert Road, and, after marching round the country all day, found ourselves in the support trenches in front of Lavieville, where we relieved the 4th Pioneer Battalion about 9 p.m. The Huns had just been thrown back off the hill into Dernancourt and Albert, and the line was in a disorganised state. Rain fell, to make things worse, and we spent a miserable few days.

The Brigade held the line in front of Albert all that month. We did three trips to the front row, and effected many improvements which greatly strengthened the position. Our patrols were active, and we raided once, the Hun showing no inclination to renew his onslaught. We were at this time a very thin khaki line, and knew it, with the 7th Brigade on our right and English troops on our left.

On the night 1-2nd May, we were relieved by the 15th Civil Service Rifles (London Regiment), and marched back to Warloy, and next day to Querrien. Here we rested in billets till the 9th, putting in most of our time on Lewis gun training. The Division moved into the Saily Laurette-Ribemont sector on the 9th, the 6th Brigade holding the left half of the "Bloody Triangle" between the Ancre and the Somme. Our Battalion spent a week in reserve at Ribemont (our old rest village), and while here we heard that we were to make the first definite offensive move undertaken by the British Army since the opening of the German offensive. This was to capture Ville-sur-Ancre.

We relieved the 22nd Battalion in front of Treux on the night of 14-15th April, and had five days in which to study the position. The plan of attack was for the 22nd Battalion to outflank Ville-sur-Ancre on the right by

capturing the 'Caterpillar,' a strongly held sunken road leading from the village on the river bank, up to the Corbie road. The 23rd and 24th were to push bridges across the Ancre, and outflank the village in the swamps to the north. Our part was to fill the gap opposite the village, and when the rest of the brigade was well established, to mop up the village, and dig in a line beyond it.

Zero hour was 2 a.m. on the 19th May, and under good barrage everything went according to plan. We entered the village much earlier than was expected, at 4 30 a.m., and cleaned up about 150 prisoners, besides inflicting many casualties. Our losses were very light. Finding the swamp untenable, we pushed out Lewis gun posts, sat in the Caterpillar under heavy shell fire all day, and dug in past the village on our appointed objective the same night. The Hun made two attempts to counter-attack, one in the afternoon, which was driven off by Lewis gun fire, and a stronger one at night, which faded away when sighted by our patrols. We cite this as the neatest little action in which we have been engaged.

Relieved on the night 20/21st May by the 7th Brigade, we moved back to La Houssoye Switch line, where we were in Divisional Reserve for 10 days. This time was mainly spent in that popular (?) form of amusement, cable burying. On the 31st we took over from the 25th Battn, in the Ville-sur-Ancre, sector. During this tour the enemy attempted to raid the 19th Battn on our right, but was repulsed, with very heavy losses. We caught the backwash, and were heavily shelled during the operation. After a week in the front row we removed to supports, round Marrett Wood, and again struck heavy shelling. Luckily, our casualties were light, as we were in good trenches.

At 12 30 a.m. on the 15th June a battalion raiding party made a successful raid at Morlancourt, obtaining identifications, and capturing a machine gun with a loss of one



## **"THE STORY OF THE TWENTY-FIRST."**

man killed, and six wounded. Next night the 2nd Division was withdrawn, and we were relieved by the 60 Battn (5th Div), moving back first to La Houssoye Switch, and then to Querrien. This time we camped outside the village, near the lake, as the Hun had formed the habit of shelling and bombing in the vicinity. The weather was hot, and we enjoyed swimming in the lake. The battalion won the cup at the Brigade Swimming Carnival.

Our next sector was to be the celebrated Villers-Bretonneux, and we moved up into reserve near Blangy-Tronville on the 28th June. On the night 2/3rd July we took over the line north-east of Villers-Bretonneux from the 5th Bde, preparatory to taking part in the attack on 4th July on Hamel, with the 3rd and 4th Divisions, in conjunction with a few Americans, who were attached for experience.

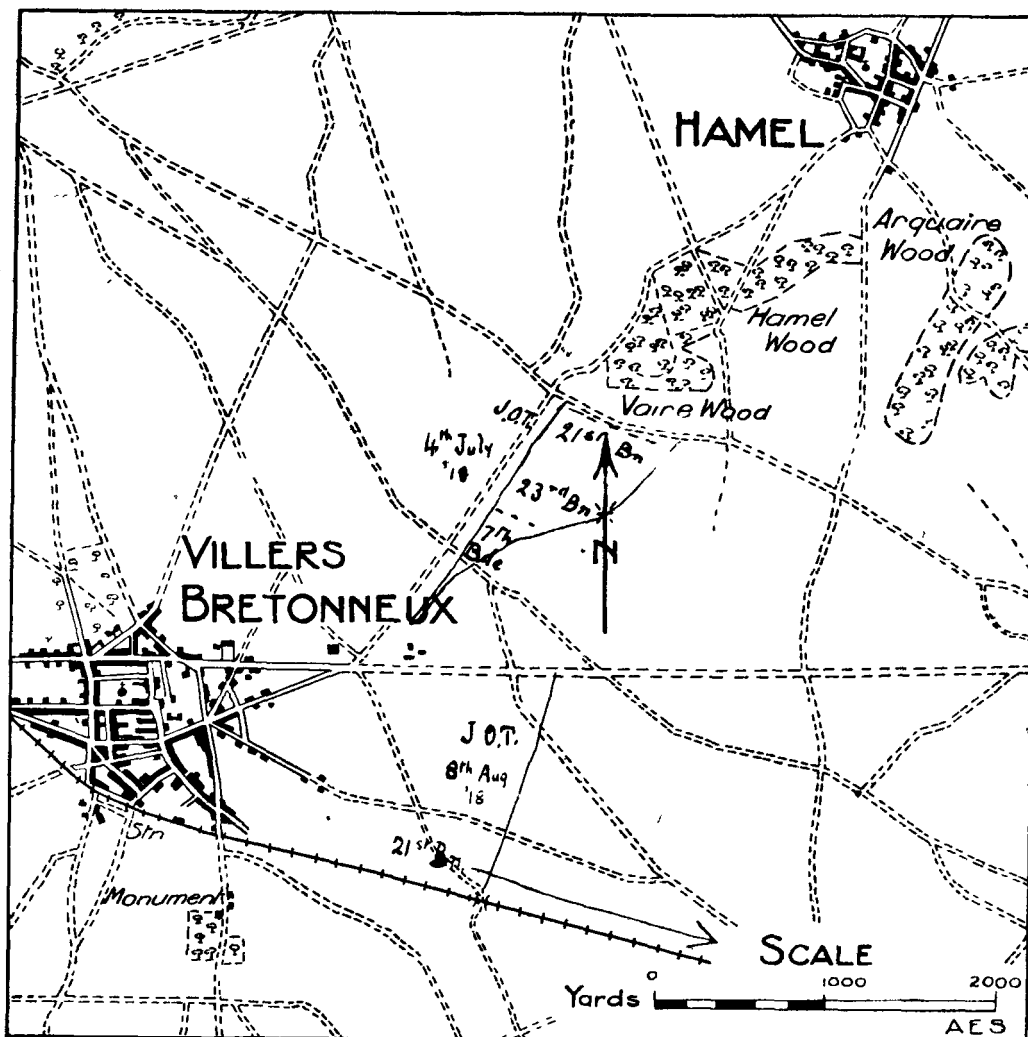
We were near the right flank of the attack, and had to advance about 1000 yds across the flat Villers-Bretonneux plateau towards Warfusee-Abancourt. The two Divisions on our left were to capture the village of Hamel and Vaire Wood, and thus straighten out the corps line all the way from Villers-Bretonneux to north of the Ancre.

As this battle has been held up ever since as an example of how a limited objective attack should be carried out, we will say no more than that we reached our objective with very light casualties, and by night the situation, as far as we were concerned, was normal again. During the day we indulged in "peaceful penetration," which we had been practising on a small scale since April, and improved our position by mopping up a few small enemy posts. In this action we

first saw tanks used to their best advantage. We had seen them often before, but they either were not in great enough numbers, or got bogged in the mud. Aeroplanes also dropped ammunition to us in parachutes, and an enemy plane dropped into our lines some bottles of coffee intended for the Huns. At both Hamel and Ville-sur-Ancre we captured enemy documents which were of great value to the intelligence department.

On the 5th July our front line "peacefully penetrated" a further 200 yards into the enemy defences, and on the night 5/6th we were relieved by the 20th Battn, and came back to reserve in trenches near Blangy-Tronville, where we stayed for a fortnight. In reserve we made friends with the French 3rd Regiment of Zouaves across the Villers-Bret road, attending their sports meeting, and playing them soccer football on 14th July.

The Brigade took over the line at Villers-Bretonneux on the night 27/28th, the 21st Battn relieving the 27th Battn, in and round the village itself. The line had been advanced about a mile in front of the village, and we moved to the front line to relieve the 22nd Battn, on night 29/30th July. At this time each battalion had an American company attached for training, and they stayed in the line with us till 5th August. Our sector extended from the Mound on the Villers-Bret-Marcelcave railway nearly to the St Quentin main road. At the Mound the lines were only 80 yds apart, and rifle bombing was lively. On the rest of the sector activity was confined to patrols and machine gunning. We were relieved by the 22nd Battn on night 6/7th, and moved to close supports.



**XII.**

**8th August, 1918.**

Being in the line we had not heard fully of the turn of the tide following on the great French and American counter-attack from Rheims to Soissons. Neither had we seen the preparations which had been going on behind our own front during the first days of August. We had merely heard rumours of an offensive at Villers-Bretonneux, and were pitying ourselves as being sure to take part in it. Our strength was very low, as we had suffered heavily from mustard gas shelling on the night 22/23rd July.

In supports on the 7th August we received our orders for an attack next morning, and with them a message from the Corps Commander (Gen Monash) explaining the magnitude of the affair. The whole Australian Corps, on a two-Division front from Villers-Bret to the Somme, with the Canadian Corps on our right, and an English Corps on our left, were to go right through without any limitations imposed by our own barrage. To say the troops were jubilant is to put it mildly. The greatest enthusiasm prevailed, and rifles were cleaned and bayonets sharpened.

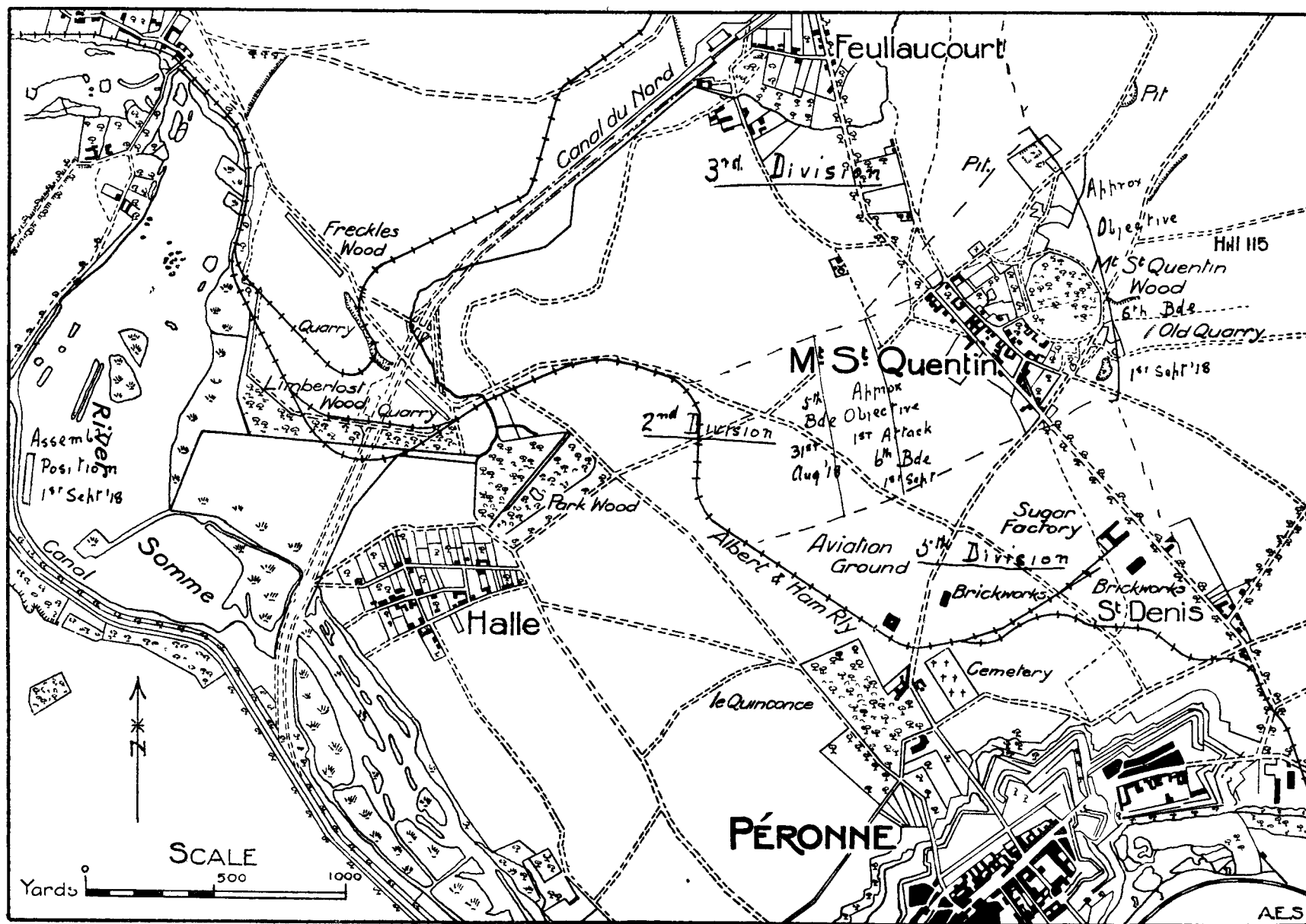
The 6th Brigade was in reserve for the 2nd Division. Our Battalion, acting as liaison with the Canadians across the railway, got full revenge on the German posts on the Mound, which had been annoying us for the past fortnight. The guns were very close up behind us, and the barrage opened with a crash at 4.20 a.m., continuing with deafening violence till 10 a.m. So accurate was our artillery that scarcely an enemy gun spoke. Having seen the Canadians well on the way, we sat tight in the old front line all day. Past us came ambulances, supply waggons, tanks, cavalry, batteries at the gallop and all the panoply of battle which one reads about in the papers but for the first time actually seen on the Western Front since 1914. That night the 5th Division, moving through the 2nd, had established a line through Vauvillers about 10,000 yards from where we started. The Divisions on either flank were

equally successful, the Hun never dreaming that the stereotyped British would attack in this overwhelming manner, beyond the cover of their own guns.

We moved up to Guillaucourt on the 9th, but the Brigade was not required to take over the line till the night 11/12th, when we relieved the whole divisional front from the 5th and 7th Bdes, in front of Framerville, with our left flank on the St Quentin rd. Our battalion was in reserve, but two companies were moved up to assist the sadly depleted 22nd and 24th when they attacked Herleville on the night 17/18th. The 22nd went over as companies 30 to 50 strong on 300 yard fronts. As the Hun was in strength, though disorganised, they had a rough passage, but the 23rd and 24th on their flanks were successful, and saved an awkward situation, by bombing laterally inwards till the 22nd were extricated.

In this advance for the first time we overran Hun headquarters, dumps, hospitals, heavy batteries, and even railway trains. Souvenirs were plentiful, and tired, but jubilant, the Division was relieved on the night 19-20th, and moved by motor bus to Daours-Corbie Area for a week's spell. While at Daours the weather was oppressively hot, so that we were glad to be camped on the bank of the Somme Canal. All the fish had been bombed out long ago, but the swimming was good.

We embussed at short notice on the evening of the 25th August, and spent the remainder of the night and next day in trenches near Proyart, taking over the front line from the 10th Battalion (1st Division) at Cappy on the evening of the 26th. Immediately commenced a series of peaceful penetrations, in which we gained about three-quarters of a mile to a mile off the Hun for two succeeding nights, finishing up by capturing the village of Frise, with 50 prisoners, on the afternoon of the 28th. During these operations we were closely followed up by the 5th Brigade, R.H.A., who proved very



## *"THE STORY OF THE TWENTY-FIRST."*

keen gunners They would fire on any target we liked to give them, provided we would take the risk of being hit ourselves They never hit us, and we gave them some pretty ticklish targets, which speaks well for their shooting

The 5th Brigade went through us on the evening of the 28th, and after a night's rest near Cappy, we moved forward after the retreating Hun, who was expected to make a stand at Mont St Quentin We stayed near Frise, on the Somme Canal, till the 31st, when the 5th Brigade attacked Mont St Quentin Although unable to hold the village, they gave the Hun a terrible shaking, and established themselves strongly half way up the hill This extraordinary feat, coupled with the success of the 3rd Division, who took the high ground to the north of Feuillaucourt, and made it possible for the 6th Brigade to attack the position again at 5 a.m. on the 1st September, in conjunction with the 14th Brigade on the right and the 11th on the left The attack was delivered by the 23rd and 24th Battalions, with the 21st in support, without the usual creeping barrage, but with artillery shooting on selected points Like the 5th Brigade on the previous day, the attacking troops had to fight their way to their assembly positions The attack carried our line well up the hill, where the leading troops found parties of the 5th Brigade, who had been surrounded all night The 14th Bri-

gade, on the right, got into Peronne after hard fighting

At 1 30 p.m., after half an hour's hurricane bombardment of the hill-top, our Battalion reinforced the fighting line, and with the 23rd and 24th finished off the job After further heavy fighting we cleared the village, and established ourselves on the far side of it For a splendid account of this action see Mr Cutlack's book To quote from a message received from the Corps Commander—"The capture of Mont St Quentin has evoked a chorus of praise from the press of the world as the finest single feat of the war"

The 7th Brigade advanced through us on the morning of the 2nd September, and inflicted another severe defeat on the Hun, after which he set off hot foot for his next defensive position, the Hindenburg line We took few prisoners, our numbers being so small, and the Huns fighting so desperately, prevented us doing so We, however, captured 58 machine guns, and many senior officers were of the opinion that there were more dead Huns after Mont St Quentin than after any other battle on the Battalion front Our casualties from 31st August to 4th September, when we were withdrawn, were —

	Killed	Wounded	Total
Officers	4	2	6
Other ranks	19	77	96

## *"THE STORY OF THE TWENTY-FIRST."*

### **XIII.**

## **The Hindenburg Line.**

Marching back to Cappy, we settled down for another short spell. Sports occupied most of our time, the Divisional sports meeting on the 16th September being the best gathering of its kind held by us in the field. On the 20th we suddenly were informed of the intention to disband the 21st Battalion to reinforce the other units in the Brigade.

What followed is known to the Brigade as the "Battle of Cappy." The field was a bloodless one, but the esprit de corps and discipline shown have never been surpassed in the face of the enemy. Immediately the decision of the higher command was made known, a chorus of protest arose from all sections of the unit. After 3½ years of active service, to break us up was to break our hearts. Deputations representing both officers and men waited on the Divisional and Brigade Commanders to put our views before them.

Orders were finally received on the 24th that we were to march out to the other Battalions the following day at 9.30 a.m. We felt so strongly on the matter that the whole unit took the extreme step of refusing to carry out this order. After consultation, it was decided that the officers should report to their new units. The men, who were not now officially recognised, held a meeting, and decided to maintain order, to carry out all routine, and to obey every order with the exception of marching out to another unit. It was also decided that any man who gave offence or went absent without leave would be drastically dealt with by his comrades.

For the whole of the 25th September, the Battalion was under the command of C S M W Trevascus, D C M, and during that time we carried on with all the usual duties, the smartness of the unit being even greater than usual. In short, the whole "battle" was a triumph of discipline.

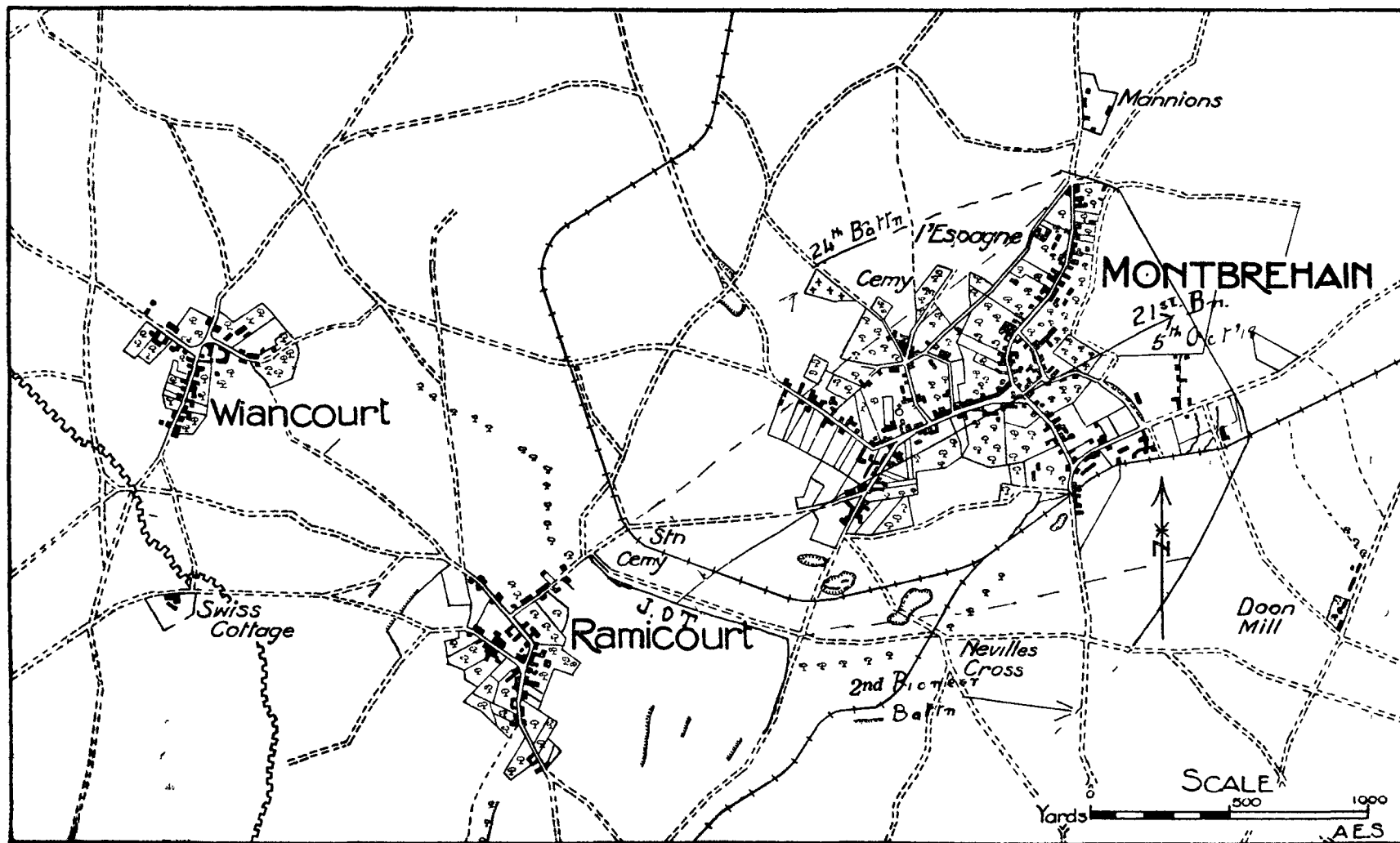
At 6.30 p.m. on the 25th, the C O was informed by the Brigadier that the disbandment would remain in abeyance, which news

was received by the assembled unit at Battalion Headquarters with deafening cheers.

On the evening of the 27th, we marched to Doingt, in the dark, as mentioned in a previous chapter, and the following night continued our move to Roisel, where we billeted in the ruins, and remained as Division in reserve for the 3rd and 5th Divisional attack on the Hindenburg Line at Bellicourt. On the 1st October we moved twice, first to the Hindenburg outpost line above Bellicourt, and then to trenches near Nauroy, which is through the main Hindenburg Line, near the St Quentin Canal Tunnel. On the 3rd October the 5th and 7th Brigades attacked, and broke the Beaufort Line, and we moved up to Folemprie Farm. The same night we made an unreconnoitred move in the dark to the trenches at Estrees, as reserve for a Brigade attack, and on the night of the 4th side-stepped to a J O T near Ramicourt, from which we were to attack Montbrehain, with the 24th Battalion on our left, and the 2nd Pioneer Battalion (for the first time in the line) on our right.

Montbrehain was a key position in the last line of the Hindenburg defences, and the Huns had brought up extra artillery and infantry to defend it. With the aid of a rather erratic, though very intense, barrage, we got away at Zero, 6.5 a.m., on the 5th October. Apparently outnumbered, the three Battalions in the attack carried all objectives, and held them, in spite of vigorous opposition, and heavy artillery fire. Our sector comprised the village itself, and all through the day the enemy tried to dribble troops up to counter attack, but they would never face the music of our sniping and machine gun fire.

Both Mont St Quentin and Montbrehain were carried out on very short notice, a few hours only. These actions serve to show the pitch of efficiency to which the Australian soldier had developed. With only information obtained from maps, we had on both





## *"THE STORY OF THE TWENTY-FIRST."*

occasions fought straight through strong enemy positions, and dug in as directed on our objectives, which were always held. The casualties at Montbrechain were greater than at Mont St. Quentin, mainly because our numbers were so small. In fact, in the earlier days we would have looked on these two performances as impossible for the number of men engaged. The Battalion consisted of Headquarters and three Companies, barely 100 strong each, in the line. At Montbrechain, for the first time, we rescued French civilians who had refused to leave the village.

On the night, 5-6th October, we were relieved by the 118th American Regiment. Our Headquarters left the line at 2.35 a.m. on the 6th, being the last Australian Infantry unit to leave the line in the war. We moved out to Nauroy, and next morning marched to Hervilly Area, entraining at Roisel on the 7th for the back areas. The casualties during these operations were:—

	Killed.	Wounded.	Total.
Officers . . .	3	5	8
Other ranks .	21	102	123

XIV.

## Last Days in France.

We detrained at St Roch station, Amiens, on the evening of the 7th October, and marched 10 miles to billets in La Chaussée and Tirancourt. We had passed through many vicissitudes since we arrived at the same station just six months before. Then, with faces set with grim determination, we had been hurried out along the road to Albert, the last resource of the British Army. Now we returned, tired, war worn, more veterans than ever, as a victorious army, which had shown the world by its final campaign what Australia could do when she was up against it.

At La Chaussée, the Battalion could not muster more than one decent sized company for parade, and when we were again ordered to sink our identity as the 21st Battalion and join the 24th Battalion as "C" and "D" Companies, we could see the inevitability of the move. Our career as an independent unit ended at 10 a.m. on the 13th October, when the C.O. officially handed us over to Major W. H. Ellwood, M.C. of the 24th Battalion.

We continued to live together at Tirancourt Chateau, both Companies being entirely officered from the 21st Battalion. The C.O. 24th Battalion (Lieut-Col W. E. James, D.S.O.) was most considerate to us, and we made friends with the other companies very quickly. Musketry and football were the chief forms of amusement, our "D" Company only being beaten by a strong H.Q. team for the football cup. Number 10 Platoon of "C" Company, under Lieut B. Besmeres, won in succession the Battalion, Brigade and Divisional Championships over a 400 yd. Bullet and Bayonet Course. The billets were roomy and amid lovely surroundings, also we were issued with mattresses for the first time on record. On the whole, it was a great spell, and we were just thinking of our move back to the line when the news of the Armistice arrived on 11th November. There was no noisy demonstration, such as took place in the cities outside the war zone, the fact was too stunning for us to realise, surrounded as we were with all the usual routine of war.

On the 20th November, the 24th Battalion, with its two new companies, entrained at Vignacourt for Busigny, in the occupied territory, but, owing to a delayed mine blow-

ing up the railway, detrained short of its destination. We put in the night at a neighbouring camp, and on successive days marched to Busigny, St Souplet, and Boulogne-sur-Helpe, where we arrived on the 24th November, and stayed for three weeks. The weather was bad, and billets were crowded, but we extracted entertainment from football, and the stories of the German occupation, which we heard from the inhabitants. While here, was formed the "1915 Company," composed of original members of the unit, who were to be sent home first.

On 17th December we marched towards our winter quarters in Belgium, near Charleroi, staging at Solre-le-Chateau (15 miles), Solre-le-Gerv (10 miles), Walcourt (10 miles), to Nalinnes (5 miles), where we arrived with colours flying, giving as good an imitation of the conquering hero as we could in the rain. Our billets here were roomy and clean. The inhabitants showed us every kindness, and we enjoyed the Christmas season, in spite of the cold weather. Each company had its own Christmas dinner, and all were voted successful. Charleroi was 11 kilos away by tram, and leave was plentiful. Brussels' leave also became available in January, 1919, and a Brigade Club was opened in that city with the profits made by the Brigade Cinema, which proved a popular form of diversion in our little community.

The first draft for Australia left on the 27th December, 1918, and the remainder of the original men and nine officers left on 13th January, 1919. These were quickly followed by all those who embarked in 1915 after which the Battalion was brigaded under Lieut-Col A. R. L. Wiltshire, M.C., D.S.O., M.C., 22nd Battalion, first at Gourdinnes, and later at Marcinelles.

At this stage our story must end. We do not claim that it is a pretentious literary achievement, but have aimed at telling the truth in all things. We trust that this short resumé will find its way into the hands of every ex-member of the Battalion, and that it may bring back happy memories of the good times, even if a bit hard, which we spent together while engaged on the great adventure.

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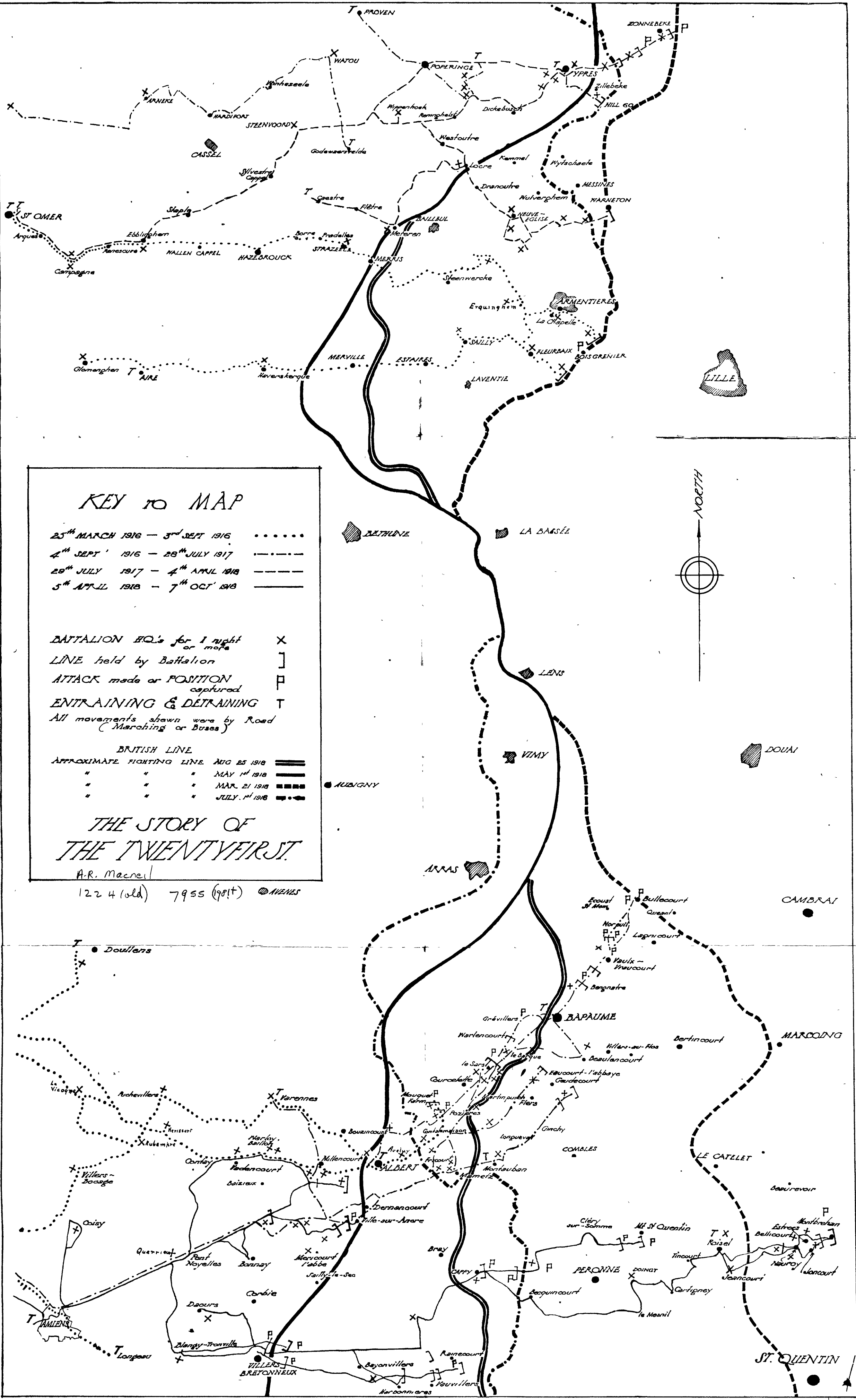
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Twenty-First



A W M O 4 6 0 4 7  
Printed & Written Records  
Australian War Memorial

WAR MEMORIAL  
PRINTED RECORDS





## KEY TO MAP

25<sup>th</sup> MARCH 1916 — 3<sup>rd</sup> SEPT 1916 .....  
4<sup>th</sup> SEPT 1916 — 28<sup>th</sup> JULY 1917 - - - - -  
28<sup>th</sup> JULY 1917 — 4<sup>th</sup> APRIL 1918 - - - - -  
5<sup>th</sup> APRIL 1918 — 7<sup>th</sup> OCT 1918 —————

BATTALION HQ's for 1 night or more X  
LINE held by Battalion ]  
ATTACK made or POSITION captured P  
ENTRAINING & DETRAINING T  
All movements shown were by Road (Marching or Buses)

BRITISH LINE  
APPROXIMATE FIGHTING LINE AUG 25 1918 ———  
" " " MAY 1<sup>st</sup> 1918 ———  
" " " MAR 21 1918 ———  
" " " JULY 1<sup>st</sup> 1918 ———

## THE STORY OF THE TWENTYFIRST

A.R. Macneil  
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